

# Show Your Faith By Your Works

James 2:14-26

SS Lesson for 02/16/2014

**Devotional Scripture:** 1 Peter 1:3-9

## OUTLINE

### INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND APPROACH TO LESSON

*Key Verse: James 2:26*

*Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary*

*Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*

*Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson*

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary*

### MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

EVALUATION OF DEAD FAITH (JAMES 2:14-20)

*Dead faith is non-profitable (14)*

Non-profitable faith is faith that is in vain (1 Cor 15:1-2)

Non-profitable faith is faith not accompanied by love (1 Cor 13:2)

Non-profitable faith is when our works deny knowing God (Titus 1:16)

*Dead faith is not providing needs (15-16)*

By withholding good from those to whom it is due (Prov 3:27-28)

By trying to avoid or get rid of those in need (Matt 14:15-16)

By not helping the helpless when given the opportunity (Matt 25:41-46)

By closing our hearts to those in need (1 John 3:17)

*Dead faith cannot produce godly results (16-17)*

Because results come from unproductive lives (Titus 3:14)

Because results come from walking in darkness (1 John 1:6)

Because results bear bad fruit (Matt 7:17-20)

Because results have been choked by the cares of this world (Matt 13:22)

Because results cause us to be ashamed (Rom 6:21)

Because results don't come from a faith that has matured (2 Peter 1:5-8)

*Dead faith can't produce actions God desires (18-20)*

Actions that don't respond to daily opportunities (Matt 25:41-43)

Actions that don't put God's word into practice (Luke 6:47-49)

Actions that hear the word, but doesn't do it (Ezek 33:30-32)

Actions that do not result in being obedient (Matt 21:28-31)

ILLUSTRATING GENUINE FAITH (JAMES 2:21-26)

*Genuine faith results in being justified (21,24)*

Justified apart from the Law (Rom 3:28)

Justified resulting in peace with God (Rom 5:1)

Justified by faith in Jesus (Gal 2:16)

Justified by being led to Christ (Gal 3:24)

Justified by being counted as obeying the Law (Rom 2:13)

*Genuine faith is saving faith (22-23)*

We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Eph 2:8)

There is such a thing as false faith, which does not save (Matt 7:21)

The faith that does not save is a mere profession of faith that does not result in a life of good deeds (Matt 15:7-9)

The faith that does not save may be doctrinally correct, but there is no change of heart or behavior (Matt 23:27-28)

Genuine saving faith results in a life of good works, whereas false faith does not (Matt 5:14-16)

*Genuine faith is doing good works (25-26)*

God created us to do good works (Eph 2:10)  
Good works are obvious (1 Tim 5:25)  
Good works include being generous and willing to share (1 Tim 6:18)  
We should encourage each other to do good works (Heb 10:24)  
Good works comes from living a life full of honorable conduct (1 Peter 2:12)

## **CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS**

CONCLUDING THOUGHT FROM BOB DEFFINBAUGH  
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY  
PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

# Introduction

## Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson reviews how we as Christians should **Show Our Faith By Our Works**. The **study's aim** is to understand the necessity of good deeds in the life of all who claim to believe in Christ and to demonstrate that saving faith gives birth to works. The **study's application** is to challenge every professing believer to examine his life for evidence of true Faith which leads to salvation.

### Key Verse: James 2:26

*26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

As a final proof of his thesis, James gave two biblical examples: Abraham, the revered patriarch, and Rahab, the redeemed prostitute. He presented each example in the form of a question, anticipating the reader's ready agreement. Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? This question is often held to be directly opposed to Paul's statement that Abraham's faith, not his works, caused God to declare him righteous (Rom. 4:1-5). Paul, however, was arguing for the priority of faith. James argued for the proof of faith. Paul declared that Abraham had faith, and was therefore justified, or declared righteous (Gen. 15:6), prior to circumcision (Gen. 17:11; cf. Rom. 4:9). James explained that Abraham's faith was evident in his practice of Isaac's sacrifice (Gen. 22:12), and he was therefore justified, or declared righteous. Works serve as the barometer of justification, while faith is the basis for justification. James emphasized the joint role of faith and... actions... working together. Faith is the force behind the deed. The deed is the finality of the faith. The verb translated was made complete (eteleiōthē) means to "carry to the end." Faith finds fulfillment in action. So it was with Abraham. James and Paul quoted the same passage—Genesis 15:6—to prove their points (cf. Rom. 4:3). Paul said that Abraham was justified by faith, and James said that Abraham was justified by faith evidenced by what he did. In the same way (lit., "and likewise also"; *homoiōs de kai*) was not even Rahab declared righteous for her actions in welcoming the spies (angelous, "messengers") and helping them escape? (Josh. 2; 6). The conclusion is most clear. Faith and deeds are as essential to each other as the body and the spirit. Apart from (*chōris*) the spirit, or the "breath" (*pneumatōs*) of life, the body is dead. Apart from (*chōris*) the evidence of works, faith may be deemed dead. It is not the real thing. True faith continually contributes to spiritual growth and development. Not only is a believer to stand confidently on God's Word even in the midst of trials and temptations (James 1), but also he must serve his brothers and sisters in Christ (James 2). He is to accept all members of God's family without favoritism (James 2:1-13) and to aid the family with a working faith (James 2:14-26). To gain spiritual maturity a believer must be what God wants him to be and do what God wants him to do.

### Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

We are to show our faith by our works (James 2:18). This seems to be what James is pointing out in our key verse text, the meaning of which has been an oft-discussed and debated topic. How faith and works work together is at the essence of New Testament Christianity. James's concern is to teach practical Christianity. What does it mean to live justly and rightly under God's rule and reign? Well, we must have a genuine faith, which will show itself in works. What does this mean? First of all, if we claim to have faith in Christ but there are no good and godly works manifesting obedience to God, then our faith is dead. It is like a dead body; there is no true life in it. James used rather stark language to get this point across. There is to be no uncertainty about this first point, and it is a sobering one. A profession of faith in Christ is not genuine if there are no works giving evidence of that faith. The implication is that true faith will manifest itself in works and deeds of obedience to God. James touches on many of these works, such as trusting God in trials (1:2-3), resisting anger (vs. 19), caring for the needy (vs. 27), welcoming the poor (2:5), caring for the needs of others (vss. 15-17), controlling the tongue (3:9-11), praying for others

(5:15), and so forth. A second point to be made in drawing out the meaning of this text is that James does not give us a formula of exactly which works must be present, how long they must be present, and in what order they must come! There is no set formula here, so we must be careful in our application and judgments. James did not give us this truth so that we can set ourselves up as judge and jury of everyone else's faith! God has not sent us into the world to be the judge of anyone's faith. He has not set up the church as a trial court. James simply gives us a sound and true principle so that we may judge ourselves (I Pet. 4:17) and so that we may understand that a mere profession of Christianity, if it produces no change, is not the real thing. The real thing is a matter of the heart and is manifested in our lives. Another point to be made is that the Christian faith is first of all a religion of the heart. We believe in the Lord Jesus in our hearts. From this it becomes a religion of life and living. This does not mean that if we ever sin, our faith is invalid. All believers will continue to wrestle with sin and the flesh. But is there a wrestling? Is there a fight? Are there some victories along the way? Is there evidence of Christian living? When we sin, do we return to the grace of God? True faith will be shown in a war between the spirit and the flesh. Dead faith has no life; there is no fight and no experience of grace. Finally, James is not teaching that we depend on our works for salvation. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. No works or deeds of our own can add to what He did for us on the cross. The Cross is sufficient. We trust fully in His work for us. What James is teaching is that godly works will accompany true salvation. Although they do not cause salvation, good works go along with it.

### **Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson**

The concept of the outline of the lesson came the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

<b>Verse</b>	<b>Phrase</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
17	Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.	Evaluation of Dead Faith
22	Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect	Illustrating Genuine Faith

### ***Lesson Introduction and Background***

#### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Have you noticed how much paper money (currency) has changed in the last few years? Designs have become more complex, colors have been added, special marks have been included. All these changes have one purpose: to make counterfeiting more difficult. But even with all these changes, a skilled counterfeiter can still create a fake that can fool many people. It still takes experts to distinguish the genuine from some phonies. One becomes an expert in spotting counterfeit currency by studying the real thing. Skilled experts can see the subtle differences because they know the real article so well. A parallel problem faced the Christians to whom James wrote. How could they identify true faith? While God alone can know what is in a person's heart, James says that we can identify true faith in ourselves by what it produces.

Evaluating actions in order to distinguish between genuine and counterfeit faith, the theme of today's text, is a well-established one in Scripture. The Old Testament prophets commonly condemned those who confessed faith but acted with disobedience to God (Isaiah 29:13; Ezekiel 33:31). Jesus famously condemned religious leaders of his time for their hypocrisy; they claimed to be faithful to God, but they disobeyed him habitually (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16; 23:13-33). Paul pointed out at length that all claims to standing with God are empty without deeds directed by godly love (1 Corinthians 13). The Bible is filled with disturbing examples of those who claimed faith in God, but failed to put it into practice. The context of today's passage gives us a clue about the circumstances that prompted James's discussion of faith and works. James's readers struggled to reflect

God's mercy toward the poor (James 2:1-13, last week's lesson). The readers' faith in the God who graciously met their needs was not being expressed in their meeting the needs of others (compare 1 John 3:17, 18). Such a problem cannot go unaddressed!

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### Evaluation of Dead Faith (James 2:14-20)

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

16 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?

17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 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.

19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!

20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

### Dead faith is non-profitable (14)

*Non-profitable faith is faith that is in vain (1 Cor 15:1-2)*

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain.

*Non-profitable faith is faith not accompanied by love (1 Cor 13:2)*

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

*Non-profitable faith is when our works deny knowing God (Titus 1:16)*

16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

### Dead faith is not providing needs (15-16)

*By withholding good from those to whom it is due (Prov 3:27-28)*

27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, When it is in the power of your hand to do so. 28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, And tomorrow I will give it," When you have it with you.

*By trying to avoid or get rid of those in need (Matt 14:15-16)*

15 When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

*By not helping the helpless when given the opportunity (Matt 25:41-46)*

41 "Then He will also say to those on His left, ' Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I

was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; 43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' 44 "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' 45 "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

*By closing our hearts to those in need (1 John 3:17)*

17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

### **Dead faith cannot produce godly results (16-17)**

*Because results comes from unproductive lives (Titus 3:14)*

14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.

*Because results come from walking in darkness (1 John 1:6)*

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

*Because results bear bad fruit (Matt 7:17-20)*

18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

*Because results have been choked by the cares of this world (Matt 13:22)*

22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

*Because results causes us to be ashamed (Rom 6:21)*

21 What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

*Because results don't come from a faith that has matured (2 Peter 1:5-8)*

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,<sup>6</sup> to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,<sup>7</sup> to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.<sup>8</sup> For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Dead faith can't produce actions God desires (18-20)**

*Actions that don't respond to daily opportunities (Matt 25:41-43)*

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

*Actions that don't put God's word into practice (Luke 6:47-49)*

47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. 49 But the one who

hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

*Actions that hear the word, but doesn't do it (Ezek 33:30-32)*

30 "As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, 'Come and hear the message that has come from the Lord.' 31 My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. 32 Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice.

*Actions that do not result in being obedient (Matt 21:28-31)*

28 "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 29 "I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 30 "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. 31 "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

### **Illustrating Genuine Faith (James 2:21-26)**

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

### **Genuine faith results in being justified (21,24)**

*Justified apart from the Law (Rom 3:28)*

28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

*Justified resulting in peace with God (Rom 5:1)*

5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

*Justified by faith in Jesus (Gal 2:16)*

16 know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

*Justified by being led to Christ (Gal 3:24)*

24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

*Justified by being counted as obeying the Law (Rom 2:13)*

13 For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.

## **Genuine faith is saving faith (22-23)**

*We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Eph 2:8)*

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

*There is such a thing as false faith, which does not save (Matt 7:21)*

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

*The faith that does not save is a mere profession of faith that does not result in a life of good deeds (Matt 15:7-9)*

7 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 8 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. 9 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."

*The faith that does not save may be doctrinally correct, but there is no change of heart or behavior (Matt 23:27-28)*

27 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

*Genuine saving faith results in a life of good works, whereas false faith does not (Matt 5:14-16)*

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

## **Genuine faith is doing good works (25-26)**

*God created us to do good works (Eph 2:10)*

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

*Good works are obvious (1 Tim 5:25)*

25 In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden.

*Good works include being generous and willing to share (1 Tim 6:18)*

18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

*We should encourage each other to do good works (Heb 10:24)*

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

*Good works comes from living a life full of honorable conduct (1 Peter 2:12)*

12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### **Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh**

*From the series: The Tests of True Religion: A Study of the Book of James*

In James 1, James defined “true religion” in terms of one’s response to their own adversity. Now, in chapter 2, James is defining “true religion” in terms of one’s response to adversity in the life of a neighbor.

In verses 1-13, James has described willful and blatant discrimination, which occurs even within the church. Now, in verses 14-26, James speaks of a much more subtle form of the sin of partiality. Our Lord simply called it hypocrisy (see Matthew 23). Hypocrisy is saying one thing, but doing another (see Matthew 23:1-3, 14, etc.). This is precisely what James speaks of in verses 14-26 of chapter 2.

The principle is stated in verse 14 and might be paraphrased this way: “Faith that is professed, but not practiced, is of no practical value to us or to others. It does not serve, and it does not save. Unused faith is useless faith.” James gives us an example of what he means in verses 15-16. Notice that James has set the rich man aside and has returned to the poor fellow, who is in need. We come upon a brother or a sister who is in great need. He does not have proper clothing, and he is hungry. Instead of providing this individual with the things he needs, we speak words which appear to be compassionate and caring, but which are not accompanied by any truly helpful actions. We send the needy person away, wishing them well. We even mention their very needs: “Keep warm and eat well.” It’s almost like sending them out with the words, “Don’t forget your lunch, and wear a warm sweater.” That’s what a mother would say to her child. But she would also hand them their lunch and their sweater. In this case, the one living “from hand to mouth” finds that we bless with our mouth but have nothing in our hand. This is especially cruel and deeply hypocritical. In some ways it is even more wicked than the blatant discrimination of verses 2 and 3.

The wickedness of verses 15-17 is couched in caring terms. I don’t know whether or not the lack of action and the hypocrisy was willful. From the vantage point of the one in need, it matters little. When these empty words have been spoken, he still lacks both food and clothing. The words do not warm his body nor do they fill his stomach. These pious-sounding words are worthless. In verse 17, James escalates this matter to a much more serious and troubling level. We would probably like to think of the sin of verses 15 and 16 as a kind of misdemeanor offense, one that might merit a mere “slap on the wrist.” Not so with James. He upgrades the offense to a felony. He says that worthless words are a most serious matter, and with this Jesus agrees (Matthew 12:33-37). What we say with our mouths is a sampling of what is in our hearts. If our words are empty, so is our faith, James says. Are we inclined to minimize vain words and empty promises? James will not allow us to do so. He tells us that a false promise is akin to a false profession of faith. If our profession is merely empty words, without any corresponding works, our profession can hardly carry any weight. As mentioned earlier, I am well aware of the fact that some think that the word “save” (verse 14; also 1:21) does not refer to one’s eternal salvation, but to the saving of one’s life. The Greek word certainly does cover a broad spectrum of meanings, including spiritual salvation. Whether or not this argument can be successfully made, no one I know of within evangelical circles would claim that James is arguing that faith plus works is required for salvation. All would agree that a man is saved by faith alone, apart from works (Romans 3:28; 4:6). Paul and James do not disagree on this, and I don’t believe that Christians should spend a lot of time arguing this matter when we all agree that it is faith alone that saves, not faith plus works. The real issue is this: is our faith genuine? A mere profession of faith does not guarantee possession of faith.

Verse 18 conveys the words of an objector, who points out the folly of thinking that mere profession of faith is sufficient evidence of the possession of a saving faith. I believe the argument goes something like this. The hypocrite insists that he is saved, based solely on his profession of belief. This is like me insisting that I am the President of the United States simply because I say so. The objector comes along and says, “That’s easy for you to say, but mere words are not compelling proof of anything, especially faith.” I understand what the objector says in the light of what our Lord said in Mark 2:3-12. There was such a great crowd gathered to see and hear Jesus that the friends of the paralyzed man could not even get into the house where Jesus was speaking. They

managed to lower their friend through the roof to where Jesus was. When Jesus saw their faith, He told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven. It didn't take a Harvard graduate to know what these words implied: Only God can forgive sins; therefore Jesus was claiming to be God. Jesus was God, and as such, He knew the thoughts of His opponents. They were thinking to themselves, "He is not God; His words are empty words." Jesus puts the challenge to Himself by saying to His critics, "Is it easier for me to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your mattress and walk'?" It was hardly possible to verify the words, "Your sins are forgiven," but one could readily validate the authority of Jesus when He spoke the words, "Arise, take up your mattress and walk." And so Jesus told this man to get up and walk, and he did. By curing this man's malady, Jesus proved that He had the power to heal. This certainly gave some credence to our Lord's claim to have the authority to forgive sins. Jesus' words were not empty words. His works accompanied his words. This is what set Jesus apart from the Pharisees. No wonder Matthew can tell us, 28 When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed by his teaching, 29 because he taught them like one who had authority, not like their experts in the law (Matthew 7:28-29). I believe the objector is employing the same kind of logic. He says, "Sure, you claim to have faith, but you have no accompanying deeds to verify that you really possess true faith. I, on the other hand, have works. Is it not right to assume that my profession of faith carries much more weight if works accompany it?" The objector then drives home his point with a powerful example. "You profess to believe that there is one God. That's good. That's orthodox. But it doesn't prove you have saving faith. Why even the demons believe what you believe, and you would have to admit that they certainly do not possess genuine faith." Faith and works are something like love and marriage (at least, something like love and marriage used to be). In the words of the songwriter of a bygone day, "You can't have one without the other."

In verses 20-24, James moves on to Abraham, the "father of the faith" to the Jews, to prove that a profession concerning one's faith is justified in the sight of men when it is validated by works. The first question we must ask ourselves here is, "Who is the 'empty person' whom James rebukes in verse 20?" Is this the objector of verses 18 and 19, or it is the one to whom the objector is speaking, the one who thinks a mere profession of faith is enough? The thrust of verses 20-26, along with the entire context, would seem to force us to conclude that James is once again rebuking the one who seeks to justify the hypocrisy of professing faith without practicing it.

I really like the way James has attacked this problem. He first gives a forceful illustration of how our words can be useless and of no practical value without accompanying works. He then extends this from a general principle to one that specifically applies to one's profession of faith and their salvation. He then critiques the error by means of an "objector," who first finds the argument lacking in logic, and next turns to a more theological objection ("the demons believe, too, but are not saved"). Finally, James himself re-enters with his objections. These are directly rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures. He first turns to Abraham, the father of the faith to the Jews, and then to Rahab, a Gentile woman of faith. James thereby makes a "clean sweep" of this error. Jacob was the black sheep of the family to the Jews, as he is to almost any reader of the Old Testament. But Abraham was revered as the father of the faith (see Matthew 4:8-9; John 8: 38-39; Romans 4:16). In verse 20, James takes up where the objector left off. Is it necessary to further prove that faith without works is dead? Then James will turn to Abraham, the "father of the faith." Abraham was justified by faith before God when he believed God's promise of a son (Genesis 15:1-6). In Romans 4, Paul makes a great deal of Genesis 15:6 to show that Abraham was saved by faith, and not by works (Romans 4:1-12). Paul says that Abraham was justified by faith when he believed God's promise that he would have a child, in spite of all appearances to the contrary. Abraham believed God and was called a believer before he did any works. Paul uses Genesis 15:6 to prove that salvation has always been by faith, apart from works. In our text, James writes that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar (verse 21; see also Hebrews 11:17-19). Are James and Paul at odds with each other? Far from it! The justification that James speaks of here is not the "justification" of salvation by faith, but rather the justification or validation of his profession of faith before men. Men do not know the hearts of other men, as God does, and so the only evidence – the only justification – of true faith is a manifestation of the fruit of that professed faith. This is completely consistent with the teaching of our Lord (Matthew 7:15-27).

Finally, James turns to Rahab, the harlot, to show how this Gentile was justified before men by her works.

Rahab was a Gentile and a harlot who lived in the city of Jericho. The nation Israel was coming to possess the

Promised Land, and the people of Jericho knew it. The Israelites were the enemy, and anyone who aided or protected them would be considered a traitor. Rahab knew that God was with His people, and that the Israelites would defeat the people of Jericho. When the two spies came to her house, the king of Jericho heard of it and sent word for Rahab to turn the men over to him. She told the king that the men had already left, but that they could be caught if they were quickly pursued. She hid the two spies under piles of flax on her roof. She told them she knew about the exodus and the way God had given Israel victory over all her enemies. She confessed, "For the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on earth below!" (Joshua 2:11). She then made these men pledge that they would spare her and her family when they attacked Jericho if she would spare their lives. Her profession of faith was justified (validated) when she followed through with her promise by letting the men down the wall of the city with a rope, sending the soldiers of Jericho after the men by the wrong route. Her profession was proven to be genuine by her practice.

James sums up his argument in verse 26: "Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." Words without works are worthless; a mere profession of faith is useless without that faith being put into practice.

*From URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/words-and-works-practical-piety-james-21-26>*

### ***Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary***

James takes his readers to school on genuine faith. He teaches them thoroughly what the real article looks like. Real faith, living faith, always works. It is always active. It never leaves a person or the world around the person the same. If we want to recognize genuine faith, we should first look at ourselves. The assessment of genuine faith is a self-assessment. What actions flow from my faith? Is my life different from what it was before I came to faith in Christ? Do I make excuses about my lack of actions? Perhaps we should remember that one of the works of genuine faith is prayer. We pray to God only if we know that we need his power to help, only if we believe that he can and will help. We begin by asking God to strengthen our faith and enable us to put it into action. Then we trust him to sustain us in the adventure that follows.

### ***Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator***

1. True faith in the Lord will have evidence that it is genuine faith (James 2:14-17)
2. Faith without works is just knowledge; we are to believe, or trust, in a way that works (vss. 18-20)
3. Abraham demonstrated that he had faith when he offered his son Isaac on the altar (vss. 21 -22)
4. God called faithful Abraham His friend (vss. 23-24)
5. Rahab had such faith in the Lord that she risked her life (vs. 25)
6. As a person's spirit gives life to his body, his works show his living faith (vs. 26)