

RUF Large Group Bible Study
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James 2:13 – 2:26²

James 2:13-26 13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. 14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So 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 apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe- and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"- and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

As we've been looking at the book of James this semester, we've been asking ourselves, "What is real faith?" All of us have friends that claim Christianity, and we wonder about that. In fact, some of us may wonder about ourselves. How do I know that I'm a Christian – what is a Christian after all? I'm here to tell you that that wondering is good, and you should do it. There is something called assurance of salvation, a knowledge that you are redeemed and united to Christ. That assurance is something that you can have, but how do you get it? That's in part what we'll talk about tonight, though we've been building toward it and hinting at it all along.

We have here one of the controversial topics in the New Testament. Some of you astute Bible students will notice that James appears to directly contradict Paul here. "Aha! This is an undeniable Bible contradiction." We'll look it it, but if that is so, we'll have to seriously reconsider our approach to the Bible and Christianity around here. I'll attempt to show you how it is reconciled to a satisfactory end.

The operating principle in this passage is something that Philip Melancthon (protégé of Luther), Calvin and others have stipulated throughout the centuries: We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. Good works necessarily accompany our salvation. "Genuine, transforming faith not only should, but *will*, produce genuine good works, notably repentance and obedient submission to Christ's lordship."³

"James is not really contrasting faith and works, as if these were two alternative options in one's approach to God. He is, rather, contrasting a faith that, because it is inherently defective, produces no works and a faith that, because it is genuine, does result in action."⁴

As we move through this passage, don't forget James 2:1 *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory*. James obviously believes in faith, and he calls us to have faith. So what is he talking about here.

There is Such Thing as a Dead Faith

We begin our look at what faith is by starting with what faith *isn't*. Simply put, it isn't empty words. Think about what James has taught us to this point. He has told us that Jesus is God in all of his glory. He's said that we were given birth by the word and that that word now lives in us. He is saying that we are new creatures with a different orbit around a new center – the Lord Jesus Christ. That is an astounding thing. That should be noticeable by others in the world around us.

Empty Confession

James puts it this way, *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?* Saying you have faith is not the same as having faith. In fact, this is one of Satan's greatest tricks. He wants people to think that they are Christians when they really aren't. Being a Christian means that Jesus Christ lives in you and you are a new creation - it doesn't occur *because* you have prayed a prayer or walked an aisle or signed a card or gone

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² Resources used: Peter Davids, *Commentary on James*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982; Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000; John MacArthur, *James*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1998; Dr. Tim Keller's sermons on James found at www.redeemer.com; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, Doubleday: New York, 1995; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James* (New Interpreter's Bible), Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1998; J.A. Motyer, *The Message of James*, Intervarsity Press: Downer's Grove, Illinois, 1985.

³ MacArthur, p. 122

⁴ Moo, p. 126

through confirmation class. He may enter your life through those means, but you may go through those means and fool yourself. You may have prayed a prayer and not received the gift of grace through faith.

I have a friend whose dad had really gone off in a bad turn. He had left his wife of twenty-five years and showed absolutely no repentance. I wanted to comfort my friend, but I had to tell him that his dad's soul was in danger for it was being consistently disobedient to Christ. My friend said this as a rebuttal, "My dad has showed me the date he received Christ. It's written in his Bible." This is anti-James thinking.

"The problem lies not with the confession itself, but from the implication that it does not go beyond the verbal to touch the heart and the life."⁵

Our words must match up with our lives. I cannot merely claim to be a minister, I need to be one. I cannot merely claim to be married, I need to be married to be able to say that. This isn't like using an old student id to save a buck at the movies (though that is wrong, mind you). It's more like movies or television shows where people have to go through elaborate ordeals in order to perpetuate their false identities – the old 70s tv show "Bosom Buddies" comes to mind.

Or think of the classic children's tale of the Emperor's new clothes. We can all deceive ourselves, and get others to play along too. But someone has to say, "Uh, you're naked" for us to deal with reality.

None of us like to be lied to. It hurts. It breaks the world. So it is with people who claim Christianity but do not have Christ in their hearts.

That lie will eventually come out. The wig will fall off. The charade will be over. Good.

False Compassion

One way our dead faith will be revealed is by our false compassion. James shows us a scenario whereby we are presented with people in need. The response is cold and callous, though it seems partially reasonable.

If you say, "*Go in peace, be warmed and filled,*" without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

I can remember that when I was in college I was pretty disgusted with the liberal agenda to make the world a better place without offering Jesus as the ultimate solution.⁶ I didn't like the idea of people going into the Peace Corps or whatever social helps group and doing good without sharing about Jesus. In fact, I'd say what good is it at all if people were clothed and fed and had shelter but were going to hell? We should be taking the money and sharing the gospel and after that's done get to the physical needs.

Ah, but I was so wrong. I was wrong because I, just like the liberals who don't understand this, had forgotten about the connection between the body and the spirit. That people are a spiritual/physical nexus. The spiritual and the physical, the body and soul are intertwined.⁷ So it is true that well-fed people can go to hell and starving people can go to heaven. But it is true that we are to help people physically and that that may change into spiritual transformation and health as well. They go together.

Charles Spurgeon is reported to have said, "If you want to give a man a tract, wrap it up in a sandwich."

I learned this lesson in part by traveling the world. I built a house with Habitat in Costa Rica and couldn't believe what we tore down to make way for our concrete slab. Dirt floor, huge rats, three-inch cockroaches. I went with ruling elder to a shanty town in CapeTown, South Africa with sacks of food. I've wandered through a similar place in Mexico City. I'm sure we could do more as a family, as a church, as a fellowship.

Ideas: www.compassion.org, www.puravidacoffee.com, www.rainbownetwork.org, www.habitat.org, http://www.unitedwayokc.org/community-initiatives_emergency-food-shelter.htm, <http://www.nonprofitsearchpositioning.org/click.php?SearchTerm=bank%20food%20oklahoma&Parent=Food+Banks>, http://www.pfm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Angel_Tree

But I can see some of your brains working now: "I should have signed up for Sooners and Seniors. Where is that list? Where can I do Habitat? I've got to get on the Angel Tree train." I certainly don't want to stop you from helping others, but you must not forget that you can't do good works to gain salvation. You won't make God like you more by helping others. Loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength will motivate you to help others, to love your neighbor as yourself. Don't forget that being impacts and precedes doing.

Love others as you would love yourself. Give your money and your time. Because you love Jesus.

Before we continue with false and dead faith, let's contrast what we've seen thus far with a Biblical example of a faith that is vibrant and alive. James tells us about Rahab. She's an odd choice, considering all the other possibilities, so it seems like James is making a point. She is a woman, a Gentile, a minor character in God's narrative, an outsider in every way, a prostitute. Yet she is said to have had great faith – she hid the spies in Joshua 2. James 2:25 says *And in the same*

⁵ Moo, p. 130

⁶ I was also listening to a lot of Rush Limbaugh back then. Sorry.

⁷ This is my same point with faith and works: "There is as much necessity that faith and works should be united to constitute true religion, as there is that body and soul should be united to constitute a living man." A. Barnes

way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

We'll see in just a minute what James means by the word "justified" but it's enough to see now that Rahab took a big risk because she believed in God. Her faith in God translated into action, even to her life being on the line. That is saying something. She took in those in need, those in trouble, those who were stranded and lost. She helped them because they needed help and because of her faith.

Contrast that with James' picture of the callous "Be warm and filled" person.

Martin Luther, somewhat ironically in this context given his antipathy for James, writes in his preface to Romans: "O, it is a living, busy active mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works."⁸

Shallow Conviction

Here's where James really turns the screws on us. He writes, *You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe- and shudder!*

There are two points here. The first is the orthodoxy of the demons. The second is their emotional response.

Demons believe in quite a bit about God. They are monotheists. They believe in the Trinity. They believe that Jesus Christ is God's son, that he came into the world to save sinners, that he lived a perfect life, died on the cross as an atonement for sins, was raised on the third day and will come again. They believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God. They believe in the work of the church.

That is a pretty good list. James isn't saying at all that it's bad to have beliefs, or even to pursue knowledge. He wants us to know more about our faith and to claim orthodoxy. But, mere knowledge isn't enough. Belief in these truths isn't enough. We must be changed by Jesus. We can read and read, and still be unmoved.

But here's something else – the demons are moved. They shudder. They have a reaction to these beliefs. In some way, it informs their lives as they swirl around these doctrines. This means that it's possible to believe in God and to even try to live a moral life because of what you believe – and not be a Christian.

Might that be you? Could that be your friends? Do you think it possible to know people who *know about* Jesus, who know about God and the Bible and even try to live according to that concept and yet who aren't truly Christians?

This brings us to a theological concept that we've been hinting at so I want to make it explicit. We need to be able to talk about the visible church and the invisible church. The visible church is made up of all those who claim to be Christians, those whom have confessed faith in Christ. The invisible church is all those who are *actually* Christians, who are in Christ. There are more people in the visible church than in the invisible church.

This gets us to Matthew 7:

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

If you are like me, you used to think that this is where Jesus sorts out the Christians and the pagans. But I think it's better understood where he separates the visible church into those who didn't know him and those who did (the invisible church within the visible church). That makes this make sense. Pagans don't say the things the "goats" say in this text. People who think they are Christians will say these things. Jesus, what are you talking about? Jesus succinctly says earlier in 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

⁸ From Luther's preface to *Romans*.

You know the evangelists who stand outside of Dale Hall? What would you characterize as their message? It's a pretty negative one. They are saying that there is good news and bad news. The bad news is that people are going to hell for their sins. The good news is that there is salvation in Jesus Christ. But that's not what people go away with, because we could all agree with that, couldn't we? Most of these men start into how you can know if you're a Christian or not. The general message is this: If you sin, you aren't a Christian. That's how you know. Sin in your life = no Jesus in your life. Jesus in your life = no sin in your life.

What's wrong with that? Well, it seriously misinterprets the data. The Bible never says that. John and Paul and James all indicate that we are in a battle with sin, one that will never be finished until we are in glory.

But wait a second. There is something right in what these men are saying too, if we understand it the right way. A Christian will still lie, lust, have idols, hate, gossip, disrespect, be lazy, be immodest, pursue unhealthy sexual sin. But a Christian should never be characterized by those things, be happy to be in those states or not care about repentance. It is unnatural for a Christian to like sin. It is monstrous. So when someone who claims to be a Christian persists in sin, shows no signs of repentance and could be characterized by that sin, then we should start to wonder. We should assure them that they should have no assurance of salvation at that point. Why do you call yourself a Christian if you persist in this without repentance? How can Christ be glorified with this? How can you live with yourself? Maybe you aren't who you say you are.

So we would say this: A Christian may act immodest for a time. But Christians pursue modest and nonChristians pursue immodest. A Christian may get involved in premarital sex for a time. But Christians pursue purity and chastity while nonChristians pursue "debauchery" and sexual sin. Christians may get involved with drunkenness or gossip or stealing for a time. But Christians pursue moderation, pure speech and giving to other while nonChristians are characterized by drunkenness, gossip and theft.

Our beliefs and our actions should intersect. "Salvation does not produce immediate perfection, but a new direction. The new disposition that hates sin, loves the Lord, and seeks to know Him and obey His will begins to manifest itself in behavior."⁹ Many of the people who react so negatively to the Dale Hall evangelists truly do know their Bible and know that they are wrong. But others, many others, hate what he says because they love their sin too much. Christians don't love sin. They hate it. They can't stand it. They pursue righteousness – their faith works.

Let's look at how James puts that together for us.

A Faith That Is Alive¹⁰

There are two indicators that you might have a faith that is alive. The first is one that we've already dealt with, albeit indirectly.

Alive toward People

We have seen James tell us that we must care about the people around us, especially the poor. Our heart for the poor shows our understanding that we too are poor and in need. Rahab provides an excellent example of this, as her faith was evidenced when she hid the spies.

What might it mean for you to be "alive to people?"

Let me particularly pick on grad students for a minute. Many of you start off and want to do extra well. You want to prove that you belong in grad school. That's fine. But you stop engaging in fellowship. You begin to spend your Sundays studying and your weekends the same. And every night. But that isn't the Christian life. Grad school is no excuse. What about people? Do you get to put people on hold for two years of your life? Do you think you'll be less busy in your next stage of life? Why?

If you can get your bearings, I think you'll see that the Bible says we are to make disciples wherever we are. No matter what stage of life we're in. That may look different in each stage, but we must maintain our contact with and heart for people. Investing in others' lives should never take a back seat to any academic discipline.

Are you alive toward people? To the poor, as we've mentioned, but also to the freshmen on your floor? What about the pledges in your house? The students in your class? The others sitting right here in this room? Have you considered getting to know them, sacrificing your time and schedule to ask questions and encourage them? A living faith gives away his or her time for others.

Alive toward God

But it's not enough to be alive toward people. James takes us to Abraham to show us the real difference. He mentions Rahab, but his deeper point is to drive us to see how Abraham's faith is shown by his works.

He writes,

2:20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his

⁹ MacArthur, p. 126

¹⁰ Thoughts gleaned from Tim Keller

works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"- and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Let's work on defining "justify" so we can understand what James means here and if it contradicts Paul after all.

Paul uses the most common definition of the word. When Paul talks he is saying that justify means to declare righteous, to be made right. When you justify a debt, you pay the debt to make it right. Thus, as Paul talks about justification, he means that works can never pay the debt – because even one wrong work sets it all off and we can never repay that one wrong work.¹¹ We are made right by faith, whereby Jesus work is credited to us as our sin is credited to him – the double imputation.

But there is another meaning of justify, and that is "to prove." To demonstrate. When I ask you to justify a bank statement, I'm not asking you to make it right, but to prove that it is right. To show me.¹² I grew up in Missouri, and we are known the Show-Me State. "Oh, yeah, I won't believe it til you show me." James is the show-me pastor.

"Paul refers to the initial declaration of a sinner's innocence before God; James to the ultimate verdict of innocence pronounced over a person at the last judgment. If a sinner can get into relationship with God only by faith (Paul), the ultimate validation of that relationship takes into account the works that true faith must inevitably produce (James). As Calvin puts it, '... as Paul contends that we are justified apart from the help of works, so James does not allow those who lack good works to be reckoned righteous.'"¹³

If this is true, then James and Paul don't contradict each other. They are getting at different problems. Paul hammers at those who think their good works will save them. James won't let you think that your faith can be of the "do-nothing" variety. Paul is against legalism. James against antinomianism.

"All of the tests are based on the foundational truth that people who make no irrevocable commitment to renounce sin and obey and serve the Lord Jesus Christ have no claim on Him and should be confronted with the reality of their lostness. How we live proves who we are – or are not – in God's sight."¹⁴

I've had to have my vision corrected since I was in 3rd grade¹⁵. Without correction, I'm legally blind, going out into the world with 20/400 vision in each eye. That is not good, and I would see clearly about one foot in front of me. Glasses were the standard until I had my first set of contacts in eighth grade.¹⁶ Both are great, as seeing is important. The worst thing, though wasn't no glasses or contacts, but only one eye corrected. If I lost a contact, I was in absolute misery. Most of time, I would take the other one out and just stumble around – having one eye right and one eye wrong drove my head crazy.

That is what is happening here. Paul is correcting one eye. He is saying that there is no salvation apart from Christ. Your works will never be enough to save you. You are justified by faith in Christ alone. Very, very true. But James is correcting the other eye. He says that that faith never remains alone. It is a faith that works, that reveals itself in what you say or do. You need both operating and correcting our faulty vision of the world in order to move and work in this alive, working faith.

Being alive to God is sort of a mysterious thing. What is it exactly? Let me submit that it's essentially this: You see, appreciate and love the beauty of God. You want to be with him. He is your friend and father.

We've already seen that even demons understand doctrine and orthodoxy. And to some extent that demons and nonChristians will see and understand his holiness, his awesomeness. On the day of judgment, *everyone* will see Jesus for what he truly is – except for one thing. Jonathan Edwards says that only true Christians will see Jesus' beauty. Only they will see his works and weep with joy at the love he's shown.

This is what it means to be a friend of God's. Think about that. When you are in a particularly good group of friends, what is that you do? I can remember my buddies in college and it didn't matter what our activity was so much; we just wanted to be together. When I met Julie, sure I'd organize dates and do fun things, but one way I knew she was the one because we could have fun sitting around doing nothing.

What is it that we're ultimately after when we're with our friends, our spouses? Not too long ago Blake surprised Kara with a trip to Chicago to hear David Wilcox? Why did he do that? To see her smile. That's why. To see her smile.

It really stinks to find out that someone was friends with you because he or she wanted something else. Maybe he wanted your sister's phone numbers. Maybe he wanted you to put in a good name for him at the office. Maybe she thought you might be rich. Movies abound with this theme: usually the guy has to find someone to marry him in order to gain an inheritance. He only has thirty days. What will he do? Find a girl – quick!¹⁷

¹¹ We are still under the covenant of works. God demands our absolute perfect obedience. This is why Jesus' life, and not just his death, matters. He gives us his perfect life so we can be accepted as perfectly obedient.

¹² I think this is the meaning of Madonna back in the early 90s when she sang "Justify My Love." Prove my love makes more sense than impute my love or pay my love.

¹³ Moo, p. 142, quoting Calvin from *Institutes* 3.27.2

¹⁴ MacArthur, p. 122

¹⁵ I had laser eye surgery in 2000.

¹⁶ Contacts rocketed me up into the coolness stratosphere. Right.

¹⁷ Intolerable Cruelty, The Bachelor, Fiddler on the Roof

But what always happens in those movies? You would be really disappointed if there wasn't the expected switch. They fall in love. The money, the inheritance no longer matters and they like each other just for each other's sake.

So we look at Abraham to understand this friendship, this beauty, this mysterious relationship. In Genesis 22, God tells Abraham to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him at the altar. Do you realize what this means? There is nothing in Abraham's life greater than his son. This is way bigger than any career, any family, any major, any trip, anything you've ever encountered. And there is absolutely no commandment that says "Thou shalt sacrifice your son."¹⁸ Abraham is giving up not only his son, but also what appears to be the promise of God for the salvation of his people. You do realize that if Abraham had actually sacrificed his son, we wouldn't be here today. There would be no lineage that would lead to Christ. It would all be over. Though Abraham had only a glimpse of that, he could perhaps sense it.

And he goes through with it. But God stops him. Why? The point seems to be made in 22:12, "*Do no lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.*" We might say it this way, if you'll allow me: "Now I see that you truly love me for my sake."

Abraham was obeying God for God's sake alone. To please Him alone. Because He could only see God and God had to be first place in our life. James says this, "*Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness*"- *and he was called a friend of God.*"

He was called a friend of God. He saw the beauty of God and acted on it in order to see God's smile.

"We might say that it costs us *nothing* to become a Christian but *everything* to live fully as one. We will bear fruit and should bear much fruit. Nothing we possess could merit the least part of salvation; but once we are saved, everything we have belongs to the Lord. That, of course, is what lordship means."¹⁹

Are you a friend of God? That might be a good tattoo to get.²⁰ Better than an ichthus or a cross or a band. Friend of God. Son of God. Daughter of God. In Latin or Greek maybe.

Being a friend of God means that you love and appreciate him. Most of us in the world, even Christians, if we're honest, want the things that God offers without God there. True faith wants God, even if that means we get nothing else.

Are you there? Could you sacrifice your most precious thing on the altar to "justify" your love for God? I will bet a million dollars he will ask you to at some point in your life, if not already and if not multiple times. It wouldn't be a sacrifice if it were easy. It would prove your faith if you didn't care about it deeply. You may lose it or you may gain it back. It may be burned up in the fire or it may be purified.

Think about your faith, my friends. Is it dead? Do you display empty confession, false compassion and shallow conviction? Or are you alive to people, alive to God, God's friend?

¹⁸ There is a whole matrix of thought about how the firstborn is God's and that God can do whatever he wants with the firstborn. It seems that this reasoning is what Abraham is thinking about when God asks him to do this.

¹⁹ MacArthur, p. 122

²⁰ pick your language: φίλος θεοῦ ; amicus Dei ; Guds vän ; Freund Gottes ; amico di Dio ; amigo de Dios ; 'ami de Dieu ; Sahabat Allah (Indonesian)