

9213

Dead Faith

Radio Sermons



by

Wayne Carver

Mr. & Mrs. John Burket
2813 Syracuse Drive
Irving, TX 75062
(214)-255-5710

Contents

Chapter	Page
Introduction (Ephesians 2:8)	
1. What Is Dead Faith? 1 (James 2:14-17)	
2. Living Faith Produces Works 6 (James 2:18-20)	
3. The Justification of Abraham 11 (James 2:21-24)	
4. Dead Men and Dead Faith 17 (James 2:25, 26)	

Introduction

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

These words, penned by the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians, clearly state the most basic principle of all Scripture. Salvation is entirely by God's grace, and His grace utterly precludes the thought of human merit. Were there any question whatsoever of merit on our part, salvation would not be by grace. "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (see Romans 4:4). If one works, he puts the one by whom he is employed into his debt, and the employer does not get out of his debt until he has paid the worker for his labor.

Therefore, if by our works, or efforts, we could earn God's salvation, we would put God in our debt. He could not then get out of our debt until He had taken us home to Heaven as a reward, as payment for what we had done. But no works of ours, no efforts of ours, no labor that we could perform, could ever put away the guilt of one sin; and so we are "shut up" to grace, to unmerited favor. It is not only unmerited favor, but it is favor against merit, for we have merited the very opposite.

"By grace are ye saved." Notice, the Apostle does not say, "By grace are ye *being* saved," or, "By grace will ye be saved eventually." He is declaring something which is already true of every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not, "By grace shall ye be saved if ye abide in the present place," but, "By grace *are* ye saved, because the work of redemption is already consummated." Therefore, God looks at our salvation as something that is finished and complete.

If there were any possibility that somehow along the way to Heaven I might lose the salvation of God, it could not be said that I am already saved, but rather that I am *being saved*. But, *thank God!* Not only is the work that saves finished, but

the salvation is looked upon as an accomplished fact! It might be translated, "By grace have ye been saved."

"Through faith"—this is the agent. Faith is simply the hand that lays hold of the gift that God presents to me. Believing the Gospel, I am saved. Some people are in danger of making a "saviour" of their faith, for they say, "Well, if I could only believe firmly enough, if I could believe in the right way, I think I would be saved." It is not a question of how one believes; it is a question of *in whom* one believes. Paul says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (see II Timothy 1:12).

Do not make a "saviour" of your faith. The Saviour is *Christ*, and faith lays hold of Him. Then, lest there should be any idea in the mind of the redeemed one that in some sense he deserves credit for coming to Christ and believing this message, the Apostle adds in Ephesians 2:8: ". . . and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

Take the message as a whole again, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." The faith is not of ourselves; faith itself is the *gift* of God. Someone is sure to say, "If faith is the gift of God and God is not pleased to give me that gift, how can I believe?"

Scripture says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." God gives the gift of faith to all who give heed to the message of the Gospel. After the Spirit of God brings that message home to the heart, it is thoroughly possible for men to resist the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, it is possible to give heed to the ministry of the Spirit, and thus be led on to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith is a gift, and apart from it one can never be saved. But in order that we may have faith, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Refuse the Word, and there will never be faith; give heed to the Word,

and faith cometh by hearing. So, of it all, it may be said, "Not of works, lest any man should boast."

This is a basic, unchanging doctrine of Scripture, and nothing in God's Word contradicts or changes it. However, there is a passage in the earliest written book of the New Testament that many have been interpreting as a contradiction to the doctrine of salvation by God's grace totally apart from works. This passage is found in the Epistle of James, Chapter 2, Verses 14-26. In these verses, James speaks of "justification by works." Knowing that the Apostle Paul used the word "justification" to speak of that state of "being declared innocent of all charges before the courts of Heaven" (the position of all the saved) many have thought that the "theology" of James and Paul were poles apart. Is this assertion true?

Martin Luther, the sixteenth century reformer who revived the early Christian doctrine of salvation by grace alone (apart from all works of merit), was so sure that he detected contradiction in James' epistle that he declared it "an epistle of straw." He refused to believe that James was an inspired writer and would not accept this letter as a part of the canon of Scripture.

Many, besides Martin Luther, have thought they detected contradictory teaching in the letter of James when compared to that of Paul as set forth in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. However, a careful examination of the writings of Paul and James will show that they were commenting on entirely different subjects. Paul was speaking on justification before God; James on justification before men. Had Luther seen this in his early days and stressed it more, he might have saved many of his followers from resting on mere credulity, and may have led them to the reality of saving faith.

The James who was the human author of this epistle was the Lord's own half-brother. He is the James who presided over the council at Jerusalem spoken of in the fifteenth chapter of Acts. He was one who remained an unbeliever

until after the Lord's resurrection. He came to know the Lord as his Saviour during the period of Jesus' post-resurrection ministry. He then became a prominent leader in the early church.

James' letter is believed to have been written in A.D. 45, making it the first written book of the New Testament. When this letter was written, almost all Christians were Jewish. The letter is addressed "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," showing that James viewed Christianity as primarily a Jewish institution. The letter is therefore intensely Jewish. It uses much Jewish terminology, and it addresses itself to exhortations that were badly needed by the Jewish "Christian" population of James' day.

James' epistle is ethical, not doctrinal. He does not deal with fundamental Christian doctrine, but rather with the concept of godliness in the personal Christian life. When he speaks of "justification by works," he does not have in view the lofty theological principle of the Christian's positional status before the courts of Heaven. Rather, he speaks of that which justifies the Christian life before men of the world. He emphasizes the testimony given before men that demonstrates the real possession of "living faith" in the life of a professing follower of Christ.

It is a grave mistake to infer, as some have done, that this epistle emphasizes works rather than faith. It stresses the importance of faith throughout, but shows that real "living faith" is *never* separated from a life of piety.

It is in Chapter 2, Verses 14 through 26, that James defines a quality that he calls "dead faith." There is a "living faith" that brings salvation and produces works that "justify" the saved one before the world. There is also a "dead faith" that results in only "profession" and not "possession." "Dead faith" does not bring salvation, and consequently it *does not* result in works that "justify" the mere "professor" before the world. "Living faith" is victorious faith. "Dead faith" is only manifested faith. It has no victory, and it produces no tangible Christian works.

1.

What Is Dead Faith?

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:14-17).

Chapter 2 of James' epistle readily divides into two sections. The first section includes Verses 1 through 13, and the second, Verses 14 through 26. In neither part is James attempting to teach cardinal Christian doctrine, but is dealing, rather, with Christian ethics. In both parts of this chapter, James stresses the importance of reality in one's attitude toward God and His Word.

James recognized that many who would receive this letter had trusted, in days gone by, obedience to the law given at Sinai as a ground of acceptance with God. (He addresses these as belonging by nature to the twelve tribes of Israel—see James 1:1.) James probes the consciences of such, in what we might think of as a roundabout way, in order to show them the folly of ever professing to obtain a righteousness of their own through legal observances. In the second part of this chapter (the part with which our study deals), the author exposes the error of supposing that mere recognition of the truth of Christianity is a faith that saves. That is, there must be *more* than recognition of Christian truth. He who has received Christ in reality will manifest his faith by his works.

It seems to be a tendency inherent in most of us to go to extremes in matters of doctrine. This is true in regard to the question of our salvation as well as in other things. This was certainly true, perhaps to an even greater degree, with

regard to the Jewish Christians of James' day. The belief in the efficacy of works among the Jews was then, and always has been, very strong.

Certain quotations from the Jewish rabbinical teachings serve to illustrate this Jewish attitude. "He that does a good work in this world, in the world to come his good work goes before him" (see Sota, 3b).

In Kethuboth, 67b, we have the following: "When Mar Ukba lay a-dying, he asked for his account; it amounted to 7,000 Zuzim (that is, this was the sum-total of his almsgiving). Then he cried out: 'the way is far, and the provision is small' (that is, he did not think that this sum would be sufficient to ensure his justification in the sight of God, and thus gain him salvation); so he gave away half of his fortune, in order to make himself quite secure."

Again, concerning a righteous man who died in the bond of sanctity, it is said (in Tanchuma, Wayyakel, i): "How much alms did he give, how much did he study the *Torah*, how many *Mitzvoth* (that is, 'commandments') did he fulfill! He will rest among the righteous."

That was the Jewish attitude in James' day. And that attitude had been carried by many into their new-found Christian faith.

Some today still insist that we are saved by character; that only as we do good works and consistently obey the Law of God can we be justified. There is another extreme. Here we find those who rest solely upon historical faith for their acceptance with the Lord, ignoring the need of that inner change which the Saviour described as a new birth, and which is evidenced by a life of practical righteousness.

The Holy Spirit used the Apostle Paul in a special way to show the fallacy of the Jewish outlook, the first of these views. He insists that justification before God is never by the deeds of the law but by faith in Christ (see Romans 3:28).

James deals with the second area. He makes it plain that the faith that saves is a faith that works, and that no one is truly justified before God (in a positional sense) who is not justified practically before men. James 2:14 states his thesis. "What profit," he asks, "if a man says he has faith and his behavior belies his profession? Is this the kind of faith that saves? Is this a 'living faith'?"

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say* he hath faith, and have not works? can (this kind of) faith save him?" What good does it do him if a man, with his mouth, *professes* to have saving faith in Christ, and yet manifests by his outward behavior that he truly has no real relationship with the Son of God? Is he really saved by just an outward profession of the mouth? James poses these questions to show that, in a practical way, true saving faith cannot be separated from the good works of a Christian life. His emphasis makes it plain that he is not speaking of positional justification before God, but rather practical demonstration of the *reality* of one's position before God by outward manifestations. James' literal words say, "What (is) the profit, my brethren, if anyone *say* (he) has faith, but works has not? Is (such professed) faith able to save him?"

James then supposes a case where one of Christ's own is bereft of clothing and proper nourishment. "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

Looking upon the unfortunate brother or sister in his or her distress, one speaks comforting but useless words, saying, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," but gives him nothing either in the way of food or clothing to alleviate his needy condition. What is the profit of these mere words to either the speaker or the needy one, when the words are not accompanied by any deeds of mercy? It is absurd to think that anything has changed simply because such pious words have poured forth from the mouth!

This illustration has direct application to the principle that James is attempting to put across to his readers. Words spoken by the mouth, in themselves, do not produce any change in any situation. Just as the cold and hungry brother or sister was neither warmed nor filled by words spoken in his or her hearing, neither is a man "born again" through the medium of empty words professing faith spoken only to be heard by men. That which is manifested is a form of "faith," but it is not a "living faith" that leads to eternal life. Rather, it is a "dead faith," and it is so defined in Verse 17.

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." Faith, when separated from Christian performance (works), is "dead faith"! Faith that is divorced from works is dead, being alone! There is no real work of grace in the heart where there are no acts of grace in the life. No man is truly justified by faith, unless faith has made him just. True faith supposes a living link between the soul and God, and that link *must* be made visible through the things that are manifested in the life.

James 2:17 provides a definition of "dead faith." The spirit-entity called "faith," is dead when separated from a body-entity called "works." This biblical definition of "dead faith" is in direct accord with other scriptural definitions of "death." Throughout the Bible, "death" means "separation." Man is capable of experiencing two deaths.

The first is "physical death." Physical death is the *separation* of the soul and spirit from the body. When one dies physically, his soul and spirit (his immaterial parts) depart from the body, leaving it alone. James gives us this definition of physical death in James 2:26: "For as the body without the spirit is dead"

The other death that can be applicable to man is "spiritual death." That death is the departure (separation) of the soul, spirit, and resurrected body from the presence of God. The Scripture refers to spiritual death as the "second death." The definition of this death is found in Revelation 20:13, 14. "And

the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death (the grave, the source of the physical body) and hell (hades, the source of the immaterial parts of the man) delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death (the resurrected body) and hell (hades, the returned soul and spirit) were cast into the lake of fire. *This is the second death.*"

Thus, James compares "faith" with the immaterial parts of a man (that is, to his spirit). He compares "works" (the good deeds that proceed from a "born-again" life) to the material parts of a man (that is, the body). Just as when the soul and spirit of the man are separated from his body, he is a "dead man"; so when "faith" is separated from its "body" of "works," it is "dead faith." "Living faith" is always attached to a "body" of righteous deeds!


Therefore, James, in defining "dead faith" says, "So also faith, if it have not works is dead by itself." With these words, he totally destroys the idea that there is such a thing as "saving faith" that is not also a "working faith." He has effectively answered his own opening thesis questions. He is now prepared to extend the principle that he has established.

2.

Living Faith Produces Works

"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:18-20).

To illustrate his definition of "dead faith," James pictures two men. One says to the other, "Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works"—something which cannot be done—"and I will shew thee my faith by my works"—the *only* way one can prove to another human being that his faith is genuine.



In James' illustration, he is saying that it is legitimate for a man who has understanding of the doctrines of "living faith" and "dead faith" to make the statement that is recorded. The opening word, "Yea," is translated from a Greek word that means "But." This word joins what has just been said to that which follows. Literally, James says, "But someone will say, Thou hast faith and I have works. Demonstrate to me thy faith from thy works, and I will demonstrate to thee—from my works—my faith."

These words form James' declaration that the only outward manifestation of the presence of true "living faith" is the performance of Christian, God-like deeds. A faith professed by the mouth, not backed by such outward deeds, is "dead faith." It is faith in *something*, but it is *not* faith in the finished work of the Christ who came as Saviour of the world! Therefore, it *does not* result in eternal life!

To paraphrase James: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alone. Therefore, it is legitimate for one man to say to another, 'You *profess* to have living faith, and I *do* have

Christ-like deeds that have been performed openly before witnesses. Therefore, you now demonstrate to me thy faith without thy similar Christ-like deeds.' (This, of course, is impossible. True faith is not discernable to any of the five senses. Professed faith cannot be illustrated before men other than by a God-like performance in one's daily life.) 'I will demonstrate to thee the reality of *my* professed faith by the deeds that I perform before men.' "

The entire point of this verse is that "living faith" *always* produces discernable righteous works in the life of the one who possesses it. "Dead faith" can produce no such works. Therefore, an absence of demonstrable works before men loudly proclaims the "deadness" of that faith which is professed.

The hypothetical speaker of James' example of Verse 18 is still speaking in Verses 19 and 20. He continues to address the one spoken to in Verse 18. The exact literal translation of the words spoken in Verse 19 is, "Thou believest that God is one. Thou doest well; even the demons believe, and shudder."

The man addressed has claimed to have faith in God, but he has been unable to demonstrate it by any works of merit. Therefore, the speaker tells him that the faith he professes is not faith in the Person and finished work of the living Christ. His faith does not go far enough. He has faith in a fact of history, but he does not have a "living faith" that brings salvation. Consequently, his faith is "dead faith."

What is the faith that the man addressed has? It is simply faith in a theological fact! "Thou believest that God is one." The man who professes faith, but who is unable to back his faith by righteous works, does believe in monotheism! He believes that there is one God, and he may even believe that God exists in three Persons, even though He is a Unity. He may know the truthfulness of what the Apostle Paul later wrote in Romans 1:20: "*For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead;*

so that they are without excuse." This man has a true understanding of many of the attributes of the one true and living God. Still, he has not exercised "living faith" in the Lord Jesus Christ as his own personal Saviour.

James continues. "Thou doest well." In other words, he says, "You're on the right track. Your faith, so far as it goes, is based on truth. However, the faith that you possess has not given you eternal life, because it is not the faith that places your entire trust in Jesus Christ. You have 'dead faith!'"

To believe the great facts about God's nature that are expressed in the things that are created, or even in certain things that are revealed in God's Word, is not enough. There must be personal commitment of the soul to Christ. Mere monotheism (belief in one God) is *not* saving faith! The demons, Satan's spirit agents of evil, believe that God is One (they are monotheists also!); and in this belief they shudder as they contemplate the day when they must face Him in the final judgment of the wicked dead and of fallen angels! Belief in monotheism (the same belief shared by the demons) has *no* saving value.

That is the point made as James' hypothetical speaker continues: "Even the demons (the word is *demons*, not *devils* as translated in the King James Version) believe, and shudder." Certainly the demons believe in monotheism! They have complete knowledge of the nature of God. They know of God's eternal existence in three Persons, and they recognize Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They *knew* that the Lord Jesus Christ was the Son of God when He walked the earth during His earthly ministry.

Do you recall the words of the "spokesman demon" of the legion of demons that possessed the madman of Gadera? When he saw Jesus he said, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not" (see Mark 5:7). The demons know all about Jesus Christ, they know all about God the Father, and they recognize the presence of God the Holy Spirit. Still,

it is impossible for a demon to have "saving faith," because God has not given these fallen spirits that gift. There *is no* plan of redemption for demons!

So James' hypothetical spokesman says, "Thou doest well (to believe in one God), even the demons believe (in the existence of one God, and they understand His nature as a God of judgment) and this knowledge causes them to shudder." They tremble at the thought of their eternal destiny, and they beg God to postpone their judgment as long as possible. Having the same faith as the fallen angels does not lead to the salvation of anyone!

Therefore, James' example spokesman continues speaking to his unsaved companion: "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" He is asking him, "Won't you now concede my point, O empty (of saving faith, and therefore of the indwelling Holy Spirit) man, that faith unaccompanied by saving works in the life of the one who professes such faith, is 'dead faith'?" Or, as James records it, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"

In this question, James once again repeats his definition of "dead faith." In Verse 17 he said, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." Death is separation; and "faith" (an intangible entity that pictures a "spirit" essence) when separated from "works" (a tangible entity, picturing a "body" essence) conforms to the definition of physical death. Just as a spirit separated from its body is a "dead spirit," so faith separated from works is a "dead faith."

And now, in Verse 20, through James' hypothetical exchange between the two men, the definition appears again. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that *faith without works is dead?*" When there is separation of faith from works, then the faith is "dead faith." There is no exception to the rule. One cannot have a "living faith" *if* that faith is not housed in a "body" of works! The "professor" of faith who has no outward deeds to illustrate his declared faith, possesses only "dead

faith." Therefore, he is "empty." That which he has is not sufficient to bring salvation. It is a mere intellectual belief, and it does not touch the heart. With only a "dead faith," the man also is "spiritually dead."

We may paraphrase James' illustration of Verses 18 through 20 as follows: "But, a man may say to a companion, 'You claim to have faith, and I have demonstrated that I have accomplished godly works: now demonstrate to me your professed faith without any outward works. That, of course, is impossible. Now, I will *prove* my faith to you *by* my demonstrated works. I know that you have believed that God is one, and that there is only one God. You're on the right track, but you have not gone far enough. Even the demons believe the same things that you believe, and you know they are not saved. They believe that there is only one God—and that God is one—also. They believe this, and they tremble as they think of the judgment to come. That is the only course they can follow. And now, will you believe, O empty one who is not the possessor of eternal life, that a faith which generates no godly works is only a dead faith?' "

Thus, James again repeats his statement, "Faith without works is dead." He then cites two Old Testament illustrations to confirm his thesis. These citations are given through a continuation of statements from the hypothetical speaker attempting to illustrate to his companion that godly works are a necessary accompaniment to saving faith.

3.

The Justification of Abraham

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:21-24).

For the second time, in Verse 20, James has defined the term "dead faith." He has had his hypothetical speaker of Verse 18 say to his companion, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" James then cites the first of two Old Testament illustrations to confirm his thesis. He says, "First, take the case of Abraham, the father of the faithful. What does Scripture teach concerning him? It shows us that he was 'justified' by works when, in obedience to the command of God, he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar."

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" This question forms one of the most controversial verses in James' epistle. In asking the question, and by his follow-up statement of Verse 22, James indicates that the answer to his question is in the affirmative. He declares that Abraham *was* "justified" by works!

In these verses, James writes something (as a truth of God) that has appeared to some to be a direct contradiction to the later writings of the Apostle Paul! Does not Paul, some eleven years later in his Epistle to the Romans, plainly tell us, "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God" (see Romans 4:2). Paul also said, concerning all who are the recipients of God's salvation, "Being *justified freely by his grace* through the redemption

that is in Christ Jesus" (see Romans 3:24). In his Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul further declared, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: *Not of works*, lest any man should boast" (see Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Is there not contradiction between these two supposedly inspired authors? Could it be that Martin Luther was right in declaring that this letter of James was not inspired Scripture, but rather just "an epistle of straw"? Many since Martin Luther have also come to a similar conclusion and have discarded this letter from the Canon. Others have been ready to "follow James," and to forsake the teachings of Paul on the subject of "justification."

How do we resolve this dilemma? Is it possible that both James and Paul wrote truth, and that there is no contradiction? Were the two inspired writers speaking of the same subject? With this last question, we have discovered the key to the dilemma! James and Paul *were not* speaking of the same thing!

Luther, and many others, have failed to note the key words of the last clause of Romans 4:2: "*But not before God.*" Paul was speaking of what he calls "*justification before God.*" He uses the word "justified" to speak of the position of the saved sinner before God. He is giving the word *justified* (Greek, *dikaioo*) a *theological* definition. He uses this word to refer to one who has "been declared innocent of all charges by the courts of heaven." He speaks of the way one's guilt is taken away by God's marvelous grace. Such "justification before God" *is* through faith by pure grace—plus nothing! *That* is the way Paul uses the word "justified"!

James is not writing a statement that stands in contradiction to the doctrinal statements of Paul. Note carefully, James and Paul agree that it was when "Abraham believed God (*that's pure faith—plus nothing!*), and it was imputed unto him for righteousness (*that is salvation—that is 'justification' before God!*)" (see James 2:23 and Romans 4:3) that he became a child of God. There is no disagreement at all!

Abraham was saved and justified by God's unmerited grace—without works—at the time spoken of in Genesis 15:6: "And he (Abraham) believed in the LORD; and he (the LORD) counted (imputed) it to him for righteousness." Abraham's works had absolutely nothing to do with his salvation! His "justification" before the courts of Heaven was by pure grace!


James is not giving the word "justified" (Greek, *dikaioo*) a *theological* definition when he uses it in Verse 21. Rather, he is using the word in complete accordance with the common usage in his day. The word means "to show, or demonstrate outwardly, that one is righteous." He does not speak of that which made Abraham righteous before God. Rather, he speaks of outward demonstrations before men that declared and proved an acceptable status (before God) attained previously. He uses the word in the sense of our English word "vindicated." Verse 21, literally translated, says: "Was not our father Abraham vindicated by works (justified as to his claim to a living faith) in that he offered his son Isaac on the altar of sacrifice?"

It was when Abraham went to Mount Moriah and there by faith offered his son upon the altar that he was *justified* (vindicated) by works *before men*, as he made manifest the reality of his profession of confidence in God and His Word. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells the story: "*By faith Abraham, when he was tried (when his faith was tested), offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.*"

Notice that our Hebrews passage says that it was "by faith" that Abraham was positioned before God so that he had the spiritual strength to perform the work that demonstrated to the world (*justified* him, *vindicated* him) that he was saved by God's grace. And notice particularly how his God-given faith was exercised. Abraham knew that all of the promises of God to him were centered in Isaac (who is here called "his only begotten son," even though he had also begotten

Ishmael—but outside the promise). He knew that Isaac must live if God's promises were to be fulfilled, and he *knew* that they would be fulfilled!

Abraham also knew that if he carried out God's instructions, Isaac would die. How then could God's promises be fulfilled in a dead son? The Sacred Writer tells us something here that was not revealed in the Genesis 22 story. Abraham did not fear Isaac's passing through this kind of death experience! He was "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." Abraham knew that God held the power of resurrection, and he knew this power would be applied if Isaac experienced death on that altar! He saw in Isaac the complete figure of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! Abraham's knowledge of this "type" is declared: "From whence also he received him *in a figure.*"



Now, what did James declare concerning the faith of Abraham? "Was not our father Abraham vindicated by works in that he offered his son Isaac on the altar of sacrifice? You see that the aforementioned faith was cooperating with his works (and thereby was responsible for their production), and by his works was this faith brought to completion in a well-rounded whole. And the Scripture was actually then fully realized (brought into operation) which said, And Abraham believed God, and it (his act of faith) was put to his account for righteousness. And a friend of God he was called" (see James 2:21-23, expanded translation).

Thus, says James, the Scripture (found in Genesis 15:6) came to fulfillment in the demonstration of that faith that Abraham had exercised so long ago. Some forty years elapsed between the patriarch's justification by faith before God (recorded in Genesis 15:6) and his justification by works before men (recorded in Genesis 22). We may see in this how true it is that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only! In other words (as Paul also tells us) faith worketh by love; otherwise it is not real "living faith" at all. It is "dead faith"—"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

It is through these continuing words that James' hypothetical speaker has demonstrated his point about "dead faith" to his companion who professed faith, yet had no works to vindicate that faith before men. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works (some forty years later), when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought (outwardly produced) *through* his works, and by works was faith made *complete* (that is, faith housed in a 'body' of works was a 'living faith'—not a 'dead faith,' in which there is separation of 'faith' and 'works')."

So, by Abraham's later act of obedience which demonstrated his great faith before the world, "the Scripture was fulfilled (given body) which *saith* (remember, at the earlier point in Scripture, only a *profession* of faith was made), Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness."

"And he (Abraham) was called the Friend of God." It was *after* Abraham had demonstrated his great faith in God by not withholding his son of the promise and God had said to him, "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (see Genesis 22:16-18), that he was called "the Friend of God."

That designation does not appear in the Book of Genesis, but it is expressed at two points in Scripture. In II Chronicles 20:7 we read, "*Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?*" And, Isaiah tells us, "*But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend*" (Isa. 41:8).

What a title Abraham was allowed to bear! He was a true "Friend of God," possessing a "living faith" that was demonstrated to all mankind by his actions on Mount Moriah!

Therefore, James continues, "Ye see then how that by works a man is *justified* (vindicated), and not by faith only." As he has already said twice (and will say one more time before this chapter is concluded), "Faith without works is dead." Man cannot be justified before man by faith only. Faith is an intangible, and it cannot be detected by the senses. We can *hear* a profession of faith, but our senses do not tell us if the profession is true or false. Only when a profession is accompanied by works that are wrought in a heart filled with a faith can we see faith "justified" before our eyes.

James' statement of Verse 24 is absolutely true, and it does not contradict Paul's thesis of Romans 4:2: "*For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.*" James declares, "Ye see (observe with your eyes, one of the five senses) then how that by works a man is *justified* (shown before the whole world to be true in his profession), and not by faith only (which cannot be seen, heard, felt, tasted or smelled)."

To demonstrate further his opening thesis, James brings up one more example of an Old Testament personage who was justified before mankind by her outward deeds, wrought in a heart filled with "living faith." The one selected is Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, who befriended the spies of Joshua, and who later became the wife of Salmon and the mother of Boaz, thus finding her way into the genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

4.

Dead Men and Dead Faith

"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:25, 26).

James has a second example from Old Testament Scripture that he uses to illustrate the difference between "living faith" and "dead faith." His example concerns the harlot Rahab, and her story as it is told in Joshua, Chapter 2. As James brings up this example, he is still quoting the hypothetical speaker who was introduced in Verse 18. This speaker is still addressing his companion who *professes* to have saving faith, yet who has no vindicating works to support his claim.

The story of Rahab is summarized in Hebrews 11:31. There, the Sacred Author has written, "*By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*" The opening two words, "By faith," tells us that all of Rahab's outward actions were motivated by a true, living faith within her heart. Because she had "living faith," she "perished not." In the historical incident, Rahab did not die with the other occupants of Jericho. Her survival of that holocaust represents, in type, the eternal life that her "living faith" wrought for her. "Because of her faith, the harlot (the Scripture points out that she *was* a vile sinner by nature!) Rahab did not suffer physical death along with the remainder of the population of Jericho who had no saving faith in the God of Israel."

But how was Rahab's "living faith" manifested before men? The concluding clause of our Hebrews verse tells us: she "perished not . . . when she had received the spies with peace." She received Joshua's spies, not as enemies to be betrayed into the hands of her countrymen, but rather as servants of the true and living God who had given her "saving

faith." Therefore, she directed them out of the city by a route that allowed them to avoid capture. From man's standpoint, she betrayed her country, and thus put her life on the line. However, she knew that God had placed her there for this very purpose. The works that she did found their source in her "living faith." These works became the outward expression, visible before men, of the intangible (but real!) faith residing within her innermost being.

We can expand our translation of James' Greek to obtain his literal meaning: "Now, similarly, was not Rahab the prostitute also *vindicated* (justified as to her possession of a 'living faith') in that she entertained as guests the messengers and thrust them forth by means of a different way (from that by which they entered the city, and therefore from that by which they were expected to exit the city)?"

Rahab's faith in the God of Israel caused her to do all she could for the protection of His servants. Her faith, outwardly manifested by her action, secured far more than just eternal life for this former prostitute. It secured for her the place of a wife and mother in Israel, even bringing her right into the ancestral line of our Lord Jesus Christ. Her place in this line is confirmed by Matthew's genealogy of our Lord's lineage. In Matthew 1:5, we read, "*And Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse.*"

In view of the revealed history of this woman, James brings her forward as a witness to the power of "living faith." Her faith could not have been "dead faith," because she performed vindicating works that found their source in the reality of what was in her heart. It is with regard to this obvious reality that James asks the question, "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot *justified* by works?"

Certainly she was! She was *justified* before God by her faith (she was declared innocent of all sin by a heavenly edict, even though she had committed the vilest sins of womanhood), but she was *justified* (proved the reality of her relationship to God) before men by her aid to God's servants; a fact

recorded in inspired history. James has provided us with indisputable proof of the truthfulness of his thesis.

It was faith alone that gave value to the works of either Abraham or Rahab. In one case we see a father about to sacrifice his son; in the other a woman betraying her country! Had there not been confidence in the living God, both acts would have exposed their perpetrators to severe condemnation.

James' conclusion is clearly made in Chapter 2, Verse 26: "*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*" In these words, James has defined "dead faith." As a part of his definition, he has also defined the phenomenon of *physical death* as it pertains to mortal men.

Note carefully the first part of the verse: "As the body without the spirit is dead." In Scripture, "death" is defined as "separation." Man is capable of dying two deaths. The first death is physical death. That death does involve a separation. And, in these words, James has told us exactly what that separation is!

At physical death, the "spirit" (the non-physical part of man) becomes separated from the "body" (the physical part of man). Therefore, a man dies when his spirit (and soul) is separated from his body.

The other death that man can die is designated in God's Word as "the second death." It is not necessary that men die this death because of our Lord's work on the Cross, but (unfortunately) uncounted millions of them will!

The "second death" also involves "separation." This death is the separation of the rejoined soul, spirit, and resurrected *immortal* body eternally from the presence of God. This death will be experienced by the unsaved dead of all ages who stand before the Lord at the Great White Throne judgment at the end of this world's history. Those who die this "second death" will be cast into Gehenna (the lake of fire) where they spend

all eternity in separation from God and His grace, which they spurned!

The second death is defined and described in Revelation 20:13, 14: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death (the grave, the source of the physical parts) and hell (hades, the source of the spiritual parts) delivered up the dead which were in them (the parts were rejoined); and they were judged every man according to their works. And death (the body) and hell (hades, the spirit) were cast into the lake of fire. *This is the second death.*"

Death *always* means *separation*! James first deals with physical death, and he tells us that death is the separation of the spirit, the real man, from the body, the temporary tabernacle. It is just as "the preacher" tells us in Ecclesiastes 12:7: "*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*" When the spirit has departed, that lifeless clay that is left is no more dead than a faith that is not manifested by works of righteousness and deeds of piety.

"So faith without works is dead also." For the third time, James has defined "dead faith." The Spirit of God *must* consider this definition important! When faith has separated itself from righteous works, then we have "dead faith"! Faith (the "spirit") when separated from righteous works (the "body") is just as dead as the spirit that has departed from its earthly tabernacle!

Just as there are such things as "dead men," many men who are living possess "dead faith." However, it is not necessary that such faith remain dead! One of "dead faith" can put his entire trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. When that one truly believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he then becomes the possessor of "living faith." The Lord himself will join that faith to a "body" of righteous works, performed in His power. "Living faith"—"saving faith"—in the One who died on the Cross at Calvary becomes the source from which a multitude of outward manifestations of that inward reality can flow! "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

James 2:14-26 has been, and will continue to be, a "stumbling block" to many. Some have taught that God should never have included this section in His Word. However, if these verses had been omitted, we would lose much indeed. We need just such clear, practical instruction to save us from antinomianism (the belief that we should "continue in sin so that grace abound"—see Romans 6:1) and false confidence. We should be glad that the Holy Spirit has so spoken through His servant, James!

The End