

VI. Real Faith Works

November 18/20/21, 2019 James 2:14-26

OT: Gen. 15:6; Jos. 2:1-12

NT: Mt. 25:31-46

Aim: To understand that James and Paul are not contradictory on the subject of justification: Paul teaches that justification (i.e., being made “right with God”) is through faith alone and that our works play no part in God’s declaration; James teaches that true faith is justified (i.e., ‘vindicated’ or ‘demonstrated to be valid’) only through works.

Hughes: The Lite Church
24% Fewer Commitments
Home of the 7.5% tithe
15-minute sermons
45-minute worship services
We have only 8 commandments – your choice
We use just 3 spiritual laws
Everything you’ve wanted in a church ... and less!

Hughes: That is the stained-glass experience of so many in the modern church today—no quickening of the conscience, no feeding of the mind, no opening of the heart, no commitment—*no real faith*. This was James’ concern a millennia ago, because it was just as likely then as today for church attenders to slide along with a bogus faith that made no real difference in the way they lived. James wants to make crystal-clear what makes faith real faith, and in doing so he sheds eternal wisdom on the relationship of faith and action.

A. Faith and Works Introduction

1. Apex

Morgan: Chapter 2:14-26 is the most theologically disputed passage in the entire letter. In chapter 1, James challenged his readers to be ‘doers’ of the Word. In 2:1-13 he applied that general exhortation to the specific sin of prejudiced favoritism. Now, in masterful language and logic, he shows what true faith and wisdom are – they go beyond empty recitation of religious platitudes and express themselves in tangible acts of obedience.

Moo: This paragraph is the most theologically significant, as well as the most controversial, in the Letter of James.... James laves us in doubt about the theme of this paragraph, announced three separate times in the course of the argument: 1) faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (v. 17); faith without deeds is useless (2:20); 3) faith without deeds is dead (v. 26);

Dorani: James 2:14-26 is rightly viewed as the theological high point of the epistle. James bends every effort to make his point clear. The kind of faith that utters orthodox words but produces no deeds is useless and dead. It has no value for humanity in this life or the next. James makes this point three times: 1) Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (2:17); 2) Faith without deeds is useless (2:20); 3) Faith without deeds is dead (2:26). In fact, he says it a fourth time, in his opening verse, a question (2:14). The literal translation of verse 14b is quite stark: ‘Faith can’t save him, can it?’ In Greek, there is a way to ask questions that shows

James – Lesson 6

the author anticipate the answer no; James uses that form, making his position clear: No, ‘faith’ *cannot* save the person who has no works.

2. Aim

Moo: In what way is such faith ‘dead’? In the sense that it does not attain its purpose: it cannot save (v. 14) or justify (v. 24). Critical to understanding the argument of the section and integrating it successfully into a broader biblical perspective is the recognition that James is not arguing that works must be *added* to faith. His point, rather, is that genuine biblical faith will inevitably be characterized by works. Trying to add works to a bogus faith is an exercise in futility, for only by ‘accepting the implanted word’ (1:21) and experiencing the inner transformation that it brings can one produce works pleasing to God. James, in a sense propose for us in these verses a ‘test’ by which we determine the genuineness of faith: deeds of obedience to the will of God.

Moo: This paragraph is the capstone on James’s presentation of ‘true religion,’ begun in 1:21. Obedience to the word, James has insisted, is a necessary mark of authentic Christianity. Taken by itself, however, such an emphasis could lead to an externalistic interpretation of Christianity, as if all that mattered was outward conformity to the demands of Scripture. And so 2:14-26 adds a necessary corrective: ‘true religion’ begins with faith – but a faith that works. In this sense, the ‘true religion’ of 1:26 is nothing more than the genuine faith of 2:14-26, and the faith vs. works antithesis of this paragraph corresponds almost exactly to the ‘hearing the word’ / ‘doing the word’ antithesis of 1:22.

3. Anti-Paul?

Morgan: Most readers are familiar with the supposed discrepancy between James’ argument here and Paul’s grand description of justification by faith alone (Rom. 3:24; 5:1; Gal. 2:16-18; 3:11). Failure to understand James’ reasoning in this section can lead to many an error. Even the great Reformed Martin Luther termed James an ‘epistle of straw’ because he thought James contradicted Paul’s great doctrine.

Morgan: But James does nothing of the kind. Quite the contrary he sows the interaction of true saving faith and resultant works. Ten times in this paragraph faith and works are mentioned together. Faith and works are not the enemies of one another; rather, righteous works authenticate true saving faith. This truly is an important discussion, for to be wrong here affects our doctrine of salvation.

Hughes: James at first glance seems to be saying that faith alone does not save.... This puts James in apparent contradiction with the Apostle Paul who argues for *faith alone* in Romans 3:28 (cp. Rom. 4:5; Gal. 3:6-14; Eph. 2:8-10).... Paul says unequivocally that salvation is *sola fide*, by faith alone. Is this a huge contradiction within the New Testament Scriptures? Martin Luther, who was battling for the Reformation doctrine of salvation through faith alone, thought so, and in the preface to his 1522 edition of the New Testament he called James a ‘right strawy epistle.’ However, there is no real contradiction between James and Paul regarding faith, for Paul’s teaching about faith and works focuses on the time *before* conversion, and James’ focus is *after* conversion.... Paul was fighting against tradition that promoted a false works salvation. James was fighting against a ‘lite’ faith that minimized the necessity of works after coming to Christ. Paul says works cannot bring us to Jesus. James says after we come to Christ they are imperative.

James – Lesson 6

MacArthur: James is...not in conflict with Paul about the basis of salvation, as some interpreters have maintained. They are not standing face-to-face confronting each other, but are standing back-to-back fighting two common enemies. Paul opposed works-righteous legalism; James opposes easy-believism. But both men make clear that we are going to be judged on the basis of what we have done, for that is a sure indicator of genuine salvation (cp. Jn. 5:28-29; Eph. 2:8-10).

Doriani: James is using the word ‘faith’ in two ways. There is a faith that makes us heirs of the kingdom (2:5), and there is a ‘faith’ that does not work and cannot save. In a way, this merely restates what James has already said: we must be doers of the word and not hearers only (1:22). Actually, Paul says the same thing: ‘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’ (Rom. 2:13). Here then is the question: What good is a faith that has no works? What good is a church service where worshipers casually mistreat people whom God has commanded them to love? What is the *value* of that worship? What is the *benefit* if someone claims to live by faith in God but refuses the way of life that God requires of the faithful? ... There is no benefit, James says.

4. Audience

Doriani: Consider...James’s audience. He wrote for Jews who took pride in their theological knowledge. They tended to think their heritage and knowledge guaranteed them God’s favor.... James hope to undermine false confidence in an orthodox confession. If Paul wrote to give comfort to those who were afflicted by guilt, then James wrote to afflict those who found false comfort in their assent to orthodox theological ideas.... Paul...ministered primarily to pagans with now clear ideas about God, and only secondarily to Jewish Christians where were perhaps confused about the relation between faith and works. Paul addresses the questions: How shall Gentiles enter the church, with or without the laws about circumcision, food, and association that separated Jews from other peoples? Must Gentiles keep the laws that established a Jew’s identity in order to be saved? Does one gain entry into the kingdom by faith alone, or by faith plus certain works? ... Paul corrects spiritual athletes who try to climb into heaven by their achievements. He roots out all false requirements for salvation (cp. Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16).

Doriani: But James has a different target audience. He speaks to people who grew up with biblical religion but never claimed it personally. They assume that their heritage, their knowledge, and their respectability guarantee God’s favor. In today’s terms, James addresses people who say: ‘Leave me alone, I am already a Christian. I’m a decent person. I have a family. I attend church and assent to orthodox creeds.’ For that situation, James says, ‘You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone’ (2:24). He urges a self-inspection: Do you prove your faith is real by deeds of sacrificial love?

MacArthur: Some Jews had gone from an extreme legalistic Judaism to the opposite extreme of an antinomian Christianity. They replaced a works-righteousness system with one that required no works at all. Those Jews who were honest had long since realized that they could not possibly keep all the commandments of God or meet His standards of righteousness. The Law as a hopelessly demanding burden they could not possible carry.... Consequently, when they heard the gospel of salvation through grace alone and faith alone, many Jews were immediately attracted. Some assumed this new religion gave everything and demanded nothing. Such people would make a profession of believing about Christ but with the mistaken notion that, because works are not efficacious for salvation, they are, therefore, not necessary for anything.

James – Lesson 6

Moo: The scenario that makes best sense is to think that [James] is writing to oppose a misunderstood form of Paul’s teaching. The readers of the letter, scattered by persecution into areas near Antioch, have become acquainted with a perverted form of the Pauline viewpoint, with the slogan ‘faith alone justifies’ as its hallmark. James writes, then, to counter this false view of the relationship between faith, works, and salvation. James and Paul, when properly interpreted in their own contexts, are not opposed to one another on this point. They give the appearance of a conflict because they are writing from very different vantage points in order to combat very different problems.

5. Application

MacArthur: A truth that James emphasizes in this text and that the Word of God teaches throughout is that what we do reveals who we are.... The genuineness of a profession of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord is evidenced more by what a person does than by what he claims. A person who professes Christ but who does not live a Christ-honoring, Christ-obeying life is a fraud.

[DSB Note: in Kinsale, Ireland, the town is 50% Protestant, 50% Catholic (due to long-term English influence). However, most people, either Protestant or Catholic do not actively practice their religion. But yet they claim to have a deep, continuing linkage to their religion. Our Catholic tour guide said that people go to church to “get hatched, matched, and dispatched’ (baptism, marriage, funeral). His uncle is a parish priest. He has a close connection to the church – and yet really has nothing to do with it either. There are many people like this in the Roman Catholic church who are ‘ethnically’ or ‘genetically’ Catholic but not religious at all. Their ‘religion’ plays no part in their everyday lives. There is no proof of their salvation, because the church and their religion are part of their culture, but not part of their daily lives. And it is not just Roman Catholics, but many mainline Protestants, too, whose faith is empty, devoid of any real spiritual content or outworking. This is the issue that James is addressing – the ‘cultural Christian.’]

B. Faith without Works Is Dead (James 2:14-19)

1. The Principle (2:14)

¹⁴*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?*

Morgan: Verse 14 asks two rhetorical questions.

Hughes: James begins his argument with two rhetorical questions that (in the Greek) demand negative answers.

a) *My Brothers (2:14a)*

¹⁴*What good is it, my brothers...*

Morgan: ‘Of what use’ abruptly begins the argument. James seems to be combatting a problem that had surfaced within the congregation. The issue at hand is the nature of true, saving faith, and given that he addresses the ‘teachers’ beginning in chapter 3, perhaps some type of erroneous and destructive heresy threatened the church.

James – Lesson 6

Moo: The direct address ‘my brothers’ suggests a topic shift. James announces the new topic in two related rhetorical questions.

MacArthur: ‘My brethren’ perhaps refers especially to James’s fellow Jews, but he is also addressing the church at large.

b) *Someone (2:14b)*

...if someone says...

MacArthur: ‘If someone says’ is the phrase that governs the interpretation of the entire passage. James does not say that this person actually has saving faith, but that he claims to have it.

Morgan: James’ imagined ‘interrupter’ claimed to have genuine faith... James imagined opponent, which he constructs here for the purpose of describing genuine faith, claimed to have a habitual, personal faith in God.

Moo: Verses 20 and following make clear that this situation is far more than hypothetical. James presumably uses this form of question because he wants to put the matter to his readers as a general rather than a specific occurrence. The use of the verb *claim* (lit. ‘says’) suggests at the outset that James questions the reality of the faith.

c) *Rhetorical Question #1 (2:14a-c)*

¹⁴*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?*

Morgan: This man had a wordy but worthless faith. Words without deeds characterized his life, and James questioned its worth – ‘what use is that, what does that profit?’ It is devoid of any operative energy to produce anything beneficial. As we shall see, James looks upon works as proof of faith, not as a means of salvation.

MacArthur: No particular kind of ‘faith’ is mentioned, but the context indicates that it refers to acknowledgment that one believes the basic truths of the gospel... Likewise, no particular type of ‘works’ is specified; but the obvious meaning is that of righteous behavior conforming to God’s revealed Word that is pleasing and acceptable to Him.

Moo: The word translated ‘deeds’ in the NIV is a critical word throughout this argument. It is the plural form of the very common Greek word *ergon*, which simply means ‘work,’ ‘action,’ ‘accomplishment.’ The plural form we find here often occurs in the NT to denote behavior with ethical and religious consequences. The ‘works’ can be evil, leading to condemnation, or good, leading to commendation from God (contrast Jn. 3:19-20 with 3:21). Particularly significant for the NT use of the word is the Jewish emphasis on ‘works’ done in obedience to Torah as the necessary response to God’s election of the people of Israel. Paul’s phrase ‘works of the law’ (Gal. 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10; Rom. 3:20, 28) clearly echoes this Jewish emphasis. James uses ‘works’ in a general sense to refer to actions done in obedience to God.

Dorani: This question addressed a real issue in James’s church, and it remains a real issue today. Many of us know people...[who] accept the biblical diagnosis of the human condition. They understand how Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection remedy their estrangement from God. They go to church from time to time. They like to read and talk about spiritual things. They know the central teachings of the Christian faith. They are pleasant folks. They seem to live decent lives, though they may indulge a vice or two. When conversation turns to Jesus or what happens after death, they sound like believers. They adhere to orthodox, evangelical theology. Yet there is nothing *distinctly* Christian about their behavior. They may be decent neighbors and may

James – Lesson 6

perform a little community service. But there is no real self-sacrifice, no costly obedience, no good deed that goes against their grain, nothing that challenges their well-designed life.

d) Rhetorical Question #2 (2:14d)

Can that faith save him?

Morgan: Obviously, a negative answer is expected. The kind of faith just described, faith without works is not able to save.

Moo: James's second rhetorical question is put in a form showing that it expects the answer 'no' (the Greek particle *mē*) signifies this); in a sense, then, it is tantamount to an assertion: 'That kind of faith can't save anyone' (NLT).

MacArthur: the question, 'Can that faith save him?', is not offered to dispute the importance of faith, but to oppose the idea that just any kind of faith can save (cp. Mt. 7:16-18). The grammatical form of the question calls for a negative answer—'No, it cannot save.' A profession of faith that is devoid of righteous works cannot save a person, no matter how strongly it may be proclaimed... It is not that some amount of good works added to true faith can save a person, but rather that faith that is genuine and saving will inevitably *produce* good works (cp. Rom. 2:6-16).

Dorani: Does the kind of faith that affirms orthodox theology, but produces no distinctively Christian deeds, save? Does *that* faith lead to justification before God the Judge? It is an old question: Does *every* brand of faith save? Is there a faith that does not? Does an evangelical confession of faith, with nothing more, make one right with God? ... When James faced it, he answered it directly. There is a 'faith' that does not save. It is the faith that adheres to orthodox theology but has no actions.

2. The Picture (2:15-17)

Moo: The two questions in v. 14 that set the agenda for the rest of the passage move from the general to the particular. The 'good' or 'benefit' of faith without works in the first question becomes salvation in the second. In his elaboration of this concern in the rest of the passage, James similarly moves from the general to the particular. Thus, in vv. 15-17, he elaborates on the lack of 'benefit' generally that one gains from faith without works. Then, after the transition in vv. 18-19, he attacks specifically the lack of saving power (using 'justify') in the 'dead' faith that produces no works.

MacArthur: Second, James illustrates his point by comparing faith without works to words of compassion without corresponding acts of compassion. This is a fitting analogy because dead faith can be characterized by false compassion, by a verbal concern for those in need that is no more than a hypocritical sham.

Hughes: To further emphasize the importance of a faith that works, James now gives a shocking illustration.

Moo: The illustration functions much like the one James used in vv. 2-3, in which a specific incident from the life of the church is used to give concrete expression to the point he is trying to make. A few commentators think that James cites an actual circumstance that he has learned about. But the Greek construction James uses to describe the incident (*ean* with the subjunctive mood) suggests (though it does not require) that James is giving a hypothetical example. And the hypothetical nature of the situation is underscored by the indefiniteness of *brother or sister*.

James – Lesson 6

Nevertheless, the fact that James again choose an example of mistreatment of the poor in the Christian community makes clear that the illustration represents a pattern of behavior that is all too typical for James's readers.

a) *The Situation (2:15)*

¹⁵*If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food...*

Moo: The Greek word represented in the NIV by 'without clothes' is *gymnos*, 'naked' (the word from which we derive 'gymnasium,' so called because Greek men competed naked in sporting events). The word can, of course, denote complete lack of clothing; but it can also designate a person wearing only an inner layer of clothing (see Jn. 2:17)... Probably, then, we are to envisage a person inadequately dressed for the conditions; he or she is 'in rags' (REB), in need of clothing (NLT; TEV; NJB). Nakedness or lack of clothing can symbolize both poverty (Rev. 3:17) and shame (Rev. 2:18). The believer is also in need of food 'for the day' (a literal rendering of the Greek word *her*). This word might mean that the believer lacked food for that particular day, but it probably means that he or she was habitually underfed, constantly falling short of the 'daily supply' of food required to sustain life and health. The picture James paints comes to life for us in the homeless of our society.

MacArthur: The Greek construction indicates a need on the part of such believers that is long-standing, not temporary. 'Without clothing' does not mean stark naked, but rather poorly and insufficiently clothed, suggesting they were cold and miserable due to lack of proper clothes. Similarly, 'in need of daily food' does not necessarily indicate starvation but rather insufficient nourishment for normal, healthy living. The reference is to those who are deprived of the necessities of life.

Morgan: James uses his creative ability to describe a scene and asks us to envisage a situation where fellow believers in need of basic necessities such as food and clothes come into contact with the church. 'Inadequately clothed' does not mean 'totally naked' but insufficiently clothed. These people are also without adequate food supplies. 'Lacking' is from *leipein*, meaning 'to leave off, be deprived.' These are people who literally live day-to-day wondering where their basic necessities will come from.

Hughes: In this illustration a 'brother or sister,' a fellow believer who sits at the Lord's Table with the rest of the church in worship, is inadequately clad, perhaps in rags or lacking an outer garment, and is so destitute that he or she does not even have food to eat that day.

Dorani: James sketches a realistic scene with a great economy of words.... When James says someone is 'without clothes,' he does not mean naked (although the Greek term *can* mean that). More likely 'without clothes' indicates someone is wearing only an inner tunic (underwear; cp. Jn. 21:7; Mk. 14:51-52) or is dressed inadequately. His clothes are either few or ragged, not enough to keep war. He lacks 'daily food' as well.... Either he is hungry that day, or, more likely, he chronically lacks food.

b) *The Saying (2:16)*

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?*

(1) The Words (2:16a)

¹⁶*and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled" ...*

James – Lesson 6

Doriani: Jesus says genuine faith meets the needs of the poor. It is not content to say, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but do nothing. Real faith knows that on the last day, when Jesus judges all people, He will mark whether we did or did not help the needed whom we met (cp. Mt. 25:36-40)... True faith meets the clear and present needs of brothers or sisters. False faith greets the needy brother with kind words and warm wishes, but no action. Instead of helping, false faith offers a false blessing. The blessing is ‘Go, I wish you well.’ ‘Go in peace’ is actually a common biblical blessing (e.g., Jdg. 18:6; 1 Sam. 20:42; 2 Kgs. 5:19; Lk. 7:50; 8:48). It means, ‘May God go with you.’ The statement itself is not objectionable. The problem is that it functions as a religious cover for a failure to act. ‘May God go with you’ stands in the place of ‘I will go with you.’ False faith...offers trite words and meaningless advice.... In this case, words without actions are useless.

Hughes: You, feeling full and satisfied in your fashionable wardrobe, see the tattered believer and with a radiant smile say, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ and without the slightest twinge of conscience go merrily on your way.

Morgan: Instead of receiving help commensurate with the love of a Christian community, all they receive is a mouthful of pious platitudes.... ‘Go in peace’ was a common Jewish farewell – *shalom* (Jdg. 18:6; 1 Sam. 1:17; 20:42; 2 Sam. 15:9). In other words, the Christians wanted them ‘out of sight and out of mind.’ ‘Be warmed’ and ‘filled’ could be either middle or passive voice. So, the meaning could be ‘warm yourselves’ and ‘feed (*chortazō*) yourselves.’ Instead of warm clothes and satisfying food, all they get is religious banality. Their words speak of grace, but even as they speak they fail to minister grace.

Moo: Faced with an obvious and immediate need, the community member (*one of you*) responds with pious words but without giving any concrete aid; *I wish you well* is more literally translated ‘Depart’ or ‘go’ in peace, a common biblical blessing (e.g., Jdg. 6:23; 1 Sam. 20:42; 2 Kgs. 5:19; Mk. 5:34; Lk. 7:50; 84:8; 24:36; Jn. 20:19; Acts 16:36). ‘Peace’ in this formula, reflecting the common biblical use of the term, is the well-being and blessedness that God gives those who walk with him.... *Keep warm and fed*. The NIV translation (which appears to assume that the verbs are middle in voice) suggests that the uncaring believer is vaguely encouraging the brother or sister to find clothing and food. But they could also be translated ‘be warmed and filled’ (NASB, taking the verbs as passive), perhaps a prayer that God would supply their need. In either case, the point is the same: confronted with a need among his own brothers and sisters, this ‘believer’ does nothing but express his good wishes.

MacArthur: ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled’ is a remarkably heartless and foolish statement, by which James indicates an attitude of total disregard for the welfare of others to the point of absurdity. People do not actually say such words, but they often imply that sentiment by a selfish disinterest that does not give those in need ‘what is necessary for their body.’ ‘Go in peace’ is the equivalent to a perfunctory, ‘God bless you’; and ‘be warmed and filled’ is tantamount to saying, ‘God take care of you’—while having no intention of being a channel for that care. The middle/passive voice of the Greek verbs rendered ‘be warmed and be filled’ suggests an even more indifferent, cruel, and sarcastic attitude which says in effect, ‘warm and feed yourself,’ as if such a needy person would not already have done so if able.

(2) The Want (2:16b)

without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

James – Lesson 6

Moo: James makes clear that the illustration of vv. 15-16 applies to the first question he raises by repeating at the end of v. 14 the same question with which v. 14 began: ‘What good is it?’ ... But some allusion to the second questions of v. 14 is probably also intended: failure to provide for an obvious need not only harms those who are in need, but also raises question about the spiritual state of the one who fails to act to relieve the need. While this illustration undoubtedly reflects conditions among his readers, James may also make an allusion here to the teaching of Jesus in the...parable of the ‘Sheep and the Goats.’ God, says Jesus, will grant entrance into the kingdom on the basis of works of charity, but dismiss from His presence those who fail to relieve the needs of the destitute (Mt. 25:42-43).

MacArthur: The question, ‘What use is that?’ implies the answer. The fatuous and outrageous comment, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ is of no use at all, being totally worthless.

Hughes: So, James properly asks, ‘What good is that?’, the only answer being, ‘None at all.’

Dorani: James 2:16 ends with the question, ‘What good is it?’ None. It does no good for the brother or sister in need. Kind wishes also do no good for those who utter them. Indeed, they prove that their faith is empty.

c) *The Summary (2:17)*

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

Moo: *In the same way* introduces the ‘moral’ of the illustration.... This conclusion suggests that vv. 15-16 have two functions in James’s argument. On the one hand, they give a concrete example of the kind of unconcern for the poor that James deplors among his readers. But, on the other hand, they also serve to provide a genuine illustration by way of analogy to the theological point that is the real burden of James at this point: the words of an uncaring believer who fails to act to help a person in need are as useless as the profession of faith of a believer who does not have deeds.

Morgan: The bottom line is this, James argues: faith apart from works is dead. It is pious talk without reality. It is ‘by itself,’ like an engine without fuel.... We are saved by faith and not by works but be sure that true saving faith will exhibit itself *through* our works.

MacArthur: Just as professed compassion without kindness and care is phony, so is that faith which is nothing but an empty claim.

Dorani: A faith that ostensibly unites a believer to the family of God, but does nothing that actually benefits his fellow believers, is useless and dead. Those who have such faith fail the second test of true religion. They have no true love of God (1:12; 2:5). They are not reborn by the word of truth (1:18). The kind of faith that offers warm wishes and trite advice is no good on the last day. Jesus described what he will do on the judgment day (cp. Mt. 25:41-43).... James does not require believers to do *everything*, but we must do *something* when we see a brother in need. For example, when someone is sick, a ‘How are you doing’ phone call may be a burden more than an encouragement. If a sister is ill, it is better to bring a meal and say the encouraging words at the door as you deliver it.

Moo: Faith that lacks works, James concludes, is...through its own inherent defect, useless, inactive, inert (the meaning of *nekros* in a context like this; cp. Rom. 7:8; Heb. 6:1; 9:14). Once again, then, we must underscore the point: 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

James – Lesson 6

that, because it is inherently defective, produces no works and a faith that, because it is genuine, does result in action.

Hughes: It is not only outwardly dead, but *inwardly* dead—totally lifeless and useless. The inconsistency between what one actually does is typical of those outside Christ.... True faith requires compassion and action.... If we tend to talk about our faith in Christ and the truth of His Word but do nothing, or very little, we may be in spiritual trouble. If we refuse to get our hands dirty, or if we are cheap and grudging with other people, we must take inventory of our souls. James says, ‘faith by itself, if it does not have works, is *dead*’—*nekros*, an ugly word. If we are ‘lite’ on works, we may be in the clutches of Satan, the *necromancer* of lost souls.

3. The Practicum (2:18-19)

Morgan: Here James shows that a faith may be very orthodox and yet be useless. Orthodoxy alone is not a guarantee of living faith.

MacArthur: A third characteristic of dead faith is shallow conviction, a recognition of certain facts about God and His Word without submission to either.

a) *The Diatribe Argument (2:18a)*

¹⁸*But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.”*

(1) Views

Morgan: James’ flow of thought here has generated quite a bit of discussion. The problem centers on the identity of the ‘someone’ (*tis*) who speaks. Basically, three possibilities exist: 1) some interpret the imaginary speaker to be an ally who takes up James’ argument and carries it forward, and the ‘but’ would then be translated as ‘indeed’; 2) others understand the speaker as opposing James, and the ‘but’ (*alla*) is a strong adversative; 3) still other interpreters take the ‘you’ and ‘I’ to refer to representative positions in the church – some have faith and some have works. The other part of the problem is how much is to be included in what the interlocuter says? It is only 18a or all the verses?

Moo: Who exactly is James quoting? How far does the quotation extend? And what is the position that the person is adopting vis-à-vis James? These questions are difficult to answer.... As a result, interpreters differ strongly on the sense to be given the verse. But the three main possibilities are the following.

Moo: 1. James might be citing the opinion of an ‘ally’ of his on the question of faith and works. James would cite this supporter in order to highlight even more clearly the questionable faith of the person whom he has described in vv. 14-17. A paraphrase will bring out just what the ally’s point is: ‘You (the false believer of the illustration) say that you have faith; and I have works. But you cannot show me your faith because you do not have works; I, on the other hand, can show you my faith by my works.’ The undoubted strength of this interpretation is that it maintains consistency in the use of pronouns throughout the verse.... But this view also suffers from a serious handicap: it does not give a very natural interpretation to the introductory quotation formula” ‘But someone will say.’ The strong adversative ‘but’ (Gk. *alla*) suggests that the view that James is about to quote is in disagreement with his own. Moreover, ‘someone’ (*tis*) seems to function like the same word in v. 14, to introduce on the scene a person with whom James will disagree. This ‘someone’ also is most naturally identified with the ‘you’ of v. 20 – and James plainly does not consider him to be an ally – ‘O foolish man.’ Adding considerable

James – Lesson 6

strength to this adversative reading of the introductory formula is the recognition that James is employing here a well-known device in ancient argumentation. A key component of the diatribe style was the frequent quotation of an imaginary interlocutor to advance one's own argument. The author would use such an interlocutor to pose questions or to raise objections to the view the author was himself propounding as a method of presenting the issues to the reader in a clear and striking manner. Paul employs this device throughout Romans.

Moo: 2. The person whom James quotes may be an objector who is casting doubt on the reality of James's faith.... This view retains the natural force of the opening phrase, but, like the first option, it suffers from a strained interpretation of the phrase 'and I have works.' Furthermore, this objector would here seem to be taking the same stance that James has, claiming to be able to demonstrate his faith through his works.

Moo: 3. The objector's views are confined to the words are confined to the words quoted in most English versions, 'You have faith; and I have works,' but the pronouns are not intended to identify James and the opponent specifically. Rather, they are used more generally to distinguish two different people, or two different positions: 'One person has faith; another has works;' or 'There is faith on the one hand; there is works on the other.' ... With either construal, the objector's point would be that faith and works are separate entities; separate 'gifts' even. Did not Paul say that the Spirit sovereignly distributed such gifts (1 Cor. 12)? And did he not say that faith itself was one such gift (1 Cor. 12:9; cp. Rom. 12:3)? How can James, then, demand that all Christians possess *both* faith and works? To this reasoning James responds that faith and works are not special gifts that a Christian may or may not have – neither is an 'option' for any Christian. Only where works are seen is genuine, saving faith present. The difficulty with this view is that 'you and 'I in the quotation do not have their natural function, specifying definite individuals.'

(2) Positions

Moo: Each view, then, has its difficulties; but, on the whole, we think the third view has the fewest. It gives a natural sense to the introductory formula, maintains the perspective on faith and works that James keeps throughout this paragraph, and fits naturally within the flow of the argument. James uses the device of the imaginary objector to further his argument for the inseparability of faith and works. In contrast to this objector, who argues that a person can have genuine faith without works, James insists that the two are always found together.

Morgan: It seems best to take the view that this is an imaginary objector (the second view mentioned above) whose objection covers only the first part of the verse. Then 18b-19 give us James' reply to the objector. Taken this way, the objector challenges the faith of James since he has put such an accent on works. The objector thus claims to have both faith and works but implies that James has only works and no faith.... The rest of the verse, then, as well as the next, are the author's answer to the challenge.

Hughes: James now brings forth an imaginary objector who has what we call a *laissez-faire*, 'live and let live,' 'I'm OK, you're OK' attitude regarding faith and works. This objector says, 'You have faith and I have works.' ... He says in effect, 'You like theology and are more theoretical and prefer to talk about faith. On the other hand, I'm of a practical bent. Faith for me is living out Jesus' teaching. We're both Christians, but we have different emphases.'

James – Lesson 6

Doriani: James anticipates a plausible objection to the message of 2:15-17. Someone will view faith and good works roughly the way we view spiritual gifts. James lets an imaginary critic speak.... The objection says faith and works are like spiritual gifts; some have one, some have the other. Faith is even called a gift in Romans 12:3 and 1 Corinthians 12:9. Works are never called a gift, but Peter does divide spiritual gifts into two categories, gifts of speech and gifts of service (1 Pe. 4:11). As the objection sees it, those who offer food and clothing to the hungry and the ragged have the gift for good works. So, someone will say, ‘Good works are for those with the gift, but my gift is knowledge or faith, not action.’

MacArthur: It seems most likely that ‘someone’ refers to James himself, speaking of himself using the third person out of humility. He was not boasting, trying to prove that his own Christian life was more exemplary than another’s. He was not speaking primarily about faithfulness *in* the faith, but about faith itself.

b) *The Diatribe Answer (2:18b)*

Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Moo: On the view we have adopted, James’s response to the objector is found in vv. 18b-19. He begins with a challenge.... The verb ‘show’ is usually taken to mean ‘make visible.’ ... This is the normal meaning of the verb (*deiknymi*) in the NT, so the interpretation is quite acceptable. But the verb can also mean ‘prove, demonstrate’ (e.g., Mt. 16:21; Acts 10:28), and the only other occurrence in James has this meaning.... James, then, may not be challenging the objector to reveal faith by actions, but to prove that he has faith by what he does – something that James himself is fully prepared to do.

Morgan: James’ response in 18b-19 says that the supposed faith can be: 1) dead (2:18b), but also 2) no better than that of the demons (2:19). Here he argues that living faith cannot be separated from deeds. The people of God cannot be divided into two camps – those who are more passive in their faith and those who are more active ‘doers.’ So, James challenges the objector to show his faith in a tangible way. ‘Show’ forms a forcible part of the rhetorical argument. It can be translated with the stronger sense of ‘prove.’... ‘I cannot see your faith apart from works,’ James argues, ‘but I am willing to *prove* my faith by what I do.’ The only certain proof of faith is the life lived after such profession of faith. Is this not what Jesus said in Mt. 7:16-17 and 7:21?

Doriani: Faith is proved by a way of life. James says, ‘I will *show* you my faith by what I do.’ When James says, ‘Show me your faith,’ he means good works make faith visible. Good works *demonstrate* that faith is real (cp. 3:13). A claim of faith is vindicated by a life of holiness and good deeds.

Hughes: James explodes, ‘Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ James challenges the pseudo-faith of the ‘live and let live objector, believing that faith and works are inseparable.... True living faith produces fruit—living action (cp. Mt. 13:23; Mt. 7:16-21).... Faith and works—neither is authentic without the other!’

MacArthur: He was saying, in effect, to anyone opposing the truth he was declaring about true salvation, ‘You claim to have faith’ and that nothing else is necessary; that your ‘faith’ can stand by itself before God and bring salvation. But the truth is, you *cannot* ‘show me your faith without the works,’ without any practical evidence or outworking of it, because true faith *always* gives practical evidence. You cannot demonstrate your kind of faith because you have nothing to demonstrate.

James – Lesson 6

c) *The Demons Argument (2:19)*

¹⁹*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

Moo: James caps his response to the objector (*you* is singular), by comparing his faith to the faith of demons. What James says here is similar to his point of departure in v. 14. In both situations, faith involves a verbal profession that does not go beyond words.

(1) You Believe (2:19a)

¹⁹*You believe that God is one; you do well.*

Morgan: Any devout Jew would recognize these words as rooted in the *Shema*, a confession embraced by Jews and Christians alike based in God's solemn revelation of Himself in Deuteronomy 6:4. But James' audience is struggling with the verse that follows: 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might' (Dt. 6:5). James used a hint of sarcasm, saying 'Excellent, you do well,' but faith in Deuteronomy 6:4 without obedience to Deuteronomy 6:5 exposes that your faith is dead and worthless. In fact, even the demons know and believe that much!

Moo: James is writing to Jewish Christians for whom the *Shema* (Dt. 6:4) would have been among the most basic of beliefs (the confession is appropriated by early Christians; cp. 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Gal. 3:20; Eph. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). Proclaiming that 'God is one' in that context would have been similar to churchgoers today loudly proclaiming their belief in the deity of Christ. *Good!* (lit. 'you do well') is James's response. James may want us to read a bit of sarcasm into his reply.... 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.

MacArthur: 'You do well' carries a touch of sarcasm, cast against an imaginary, but universally common, orthodoxy that is devoid of saving faith. Orthodox doctrine is no guarantee of salvation, James insists. Even the 'demons' are orthodox in the sense of knowing and acknowledging God.... James' point, as it were, is that belief in the truth of Deuteronomy 6:4 without obedience to Deuteronomy 6:5 is a worthless kind of belief like that possessed by 'demons.'

(2) Demons Believe (2:19b)

Even the demons believe—

Moo: The demons perfectly illustrate the poverty of verbal profession in and of itself. They are among the most 'orthodox' of theologians, James suggests, agreeing wholeheartedly with the *Shema*.

MacArthur: As far as factual doctrine is concerned, demons are monotheists, all of whom know and believe there is one true God. They are also very much aware that Scripture is God's Word, that Jesus Christ is God's Son, that salvation is by grace through faith, that Jesus died, was buried, and raised to atone for the sins of the world, and that He ascended to heaven and is now seated at His Father's right hand. They know quite well that there is a literal heaven and a literal hell.... But all of that orthodox knowledge, divinely and eternally significant as it is, cannot save them. They know the truth about God, Christ, and the Spirit, but hate it and them.

Morgan: As far as doctrine is concerned, demons are monotheistic – they all know and believe there is but one God. Furthermore, they are very much aware that Scripture is God's Word;

James – Lesson 6

Satan himself admitted as much in the wilderness temptations of Jesus (Mt. 4). They know and believe that Jesus is God's Son and that he has authority over them. Each time they confronted Him in the Gospels they knew exactly who He was, and they acknowledged His authority over them. They know and believe that salvation is by God's grace through faith, that Jesus sided, was buried, was raised to atone for the sins of mankind, and that He ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven. They know quite well that He will return to earth and they believe in a literal hell!

Dorani: James uses the 'faith' of demons to illustrate his point. Demons have at least some orthodox theological ideas. They are monotheistic. They believe that there is once God and that Jesus is His unique Son.

Hughes: James concludes this section by taking his hearers to the absurd.... There is not a demon in the universe who is an atheist! There are, no doubt, some who are spirits of atheism, demons who have influenced and danced on the graves of the likes of Bertrand Russell. But all are thorough-going *monotheists*, for they believe God is one (Dt. 6:4-5). And they are all *Trinitarian*. They know the Apostle's Creed is true: God is the Maker, and Jesus is His virgin-born Son. They know the truth of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and coming return. Some, no doubt, can quote the Nicene Creed.... Some demons are great theologians, having been unseen interlopers in Nicea and Chalcedon and Worms.

(3) Demons Shudder (2:19c)

—*and shudder!*

Moo: Yet what is their reaction? They *shudder*. This verb, used only here in the NT, refers to the reaction of fear provoked by contact with God or the supernatural. It occurs frequently in the papyri to describe the effect that a sorcerer aims to produce in his hearers. Since ancient people often regarded the very pronouncing of the name of a god as having the power to provoke fear and terror, the verb is particularly appropriate in this context.

Dorani: Yet demons are tormented and terrified by their beliefs. They shudder when they think of God. They are not saved by their theological orthodoxy. The truth torments and terrifies them, for they do not add love of God to their 'knowledge' of Him.

Morgan: Because of this they 'shudder,' a word that means to bristle and tremble in the face of great fear.

Hughes: In fact, some demons have better theology than we do! But it does them no good. James says they 'shudder'—*phrissousin*. Literally, they 'bristle up' like a frightened cat. James' point is, *there is a belief that is not true faith....* Real faith is more than mental assent to truth. It is a belief that involves the heart (cp. Rom. 10:9-10)....

MacArthur: *Phrissō* ('shudder') means to bristle and tremble and was commonly used of the trembling associated with great fear. Demons at least have the sense to 'shudder' at God's truth in a state of fear, for they know that eternal torment awaits them in hell (Mt. 8:29-31; Mk. 5:7; Lk. 4:41; Acts 19:15). In that regard, they are much more realistic and sensible than those with false faith who think they will escape God's judgment by their shallow and superficial faith.

James – Lesson 6

4. The Precis

Hughes: There is no such thing as a ‘lite’ faith. A real faith is committed. It wholeheartedly follows the Master. It reflexively reaches out to those it perceives to be in need. It places its hands on the infections of the ill. It works to meet the spiritual and material needs of us all.

Doriani: Millions have a dead, orthodox faith. They attend church frequently and know the gospel intellectually. They may even live morally. But the thought of meeting the eternal God creates terror. John says perfect love for God ‘drives out fear’ (1 Jn. 4:18). True faith, faith that knows and trusts God as He presents Himself in the gospel, casts out servile fear. It grants peace with God, a desire for His word, and the capacity to put away sin—a capacity that shows itself in stronger relationships and better behavior at work and at play.

C. Faith with Works Is Alive (James 2:20-26)

Morgan: Having denounced dead and demon-like faith as useless and destitute of saving power, James now begins to confirm from Scripture the positive truth that saving faith reveals itself through tangible acts of righteousness. In doing so he effectively brings forward two people who could not be more disparate. These examples of true faith that works are Abraham and Rahab – a patriarch and a prostitute, a Jew and a Gentile, a godly man and a godless woman.

MacArthur: Here James contrasts living faith with what he has just described as dead faith (vv. 14ff), saving faith with non-saving faith, productive faith with unproductive faith, godly faith with a kind of faith that is exercised even by demons. In doing so, he does what might be expected, giving living illustrations of living faith. The first is Abraham, revered patriarch and father of the Hebrew people (vv. 21-24). The second is Rahab, a Gentile prostitute (v. 25).

1. The Principle Again (2:20)

²⁰*Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?*

Moo: This verse belongs more to what follows than to what precedes. It introduces the subject that will occupy James in the rest of the chapter. In v. 17, James asserted that ‘faith, by itself if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.’ He now takes up this point to provide support for it. This support takes the form of OT evidence for the positive role of works (vv. 21-25). James then draws this section to a close by restating the key point: *faith without deeds is dead.*

Doriani: James invites his readers to consider the ‘evidence that faith without deeds is useless.’ (Verse 20 seems to be both James’ last word about false faith, the theme of 2:14-19, and his first word about true faith, the theme of 2:20-26.) ... The lively faith of Abraham contrasts with the fecklessness of false faith. When Abraham believed God, it led to wondrous works.

Morgan: The diatribe form of argument continues here. James appeals to the objector to acknowledge that the conclusion just reached in verse 19 is valid, but the verse has a transitional character. James is preparing to marshal forth two specific examples to demonstrate his point. ‘Empty-headed’ carries the idea of vain or deficient, much as Paul used ‘fool’ in 1 Cor. 15:36.

MacArthur: ‘Foolish’ has the idea of ‘empty’ or ‘defective’ and identifies anyone who opposed the truth that true saving faith produces works of righteousness. *Argos* (‘useless’) carries the idea of fruitlessness, lack of productivity: ‘Every good tree that does not bear good fruit,’ Jesus said, ‘is cut down and thrown into the fire’ (Mt. 7:19). A fruitless life is a certain proof that it

James – Lesson 6

does not belong to God and is unacceptable to God, because it does not have His divine life within.

Hughes: ‘Foolish’ means literally ‘empty,’ suggesting in today’s language shallowness. *O empty, shallow man!*

Moo: *You foolish man* is the kind of direct address of a fictitious opponent typical of the diatribe style (see, in the NT, Rom. 2:1; 9:20)... ‘Foolish’ translates a Greek word that means literally, ‘empty.’ The word is seldom applied in biblical Greek (cp. Only Jdg. 9:4 and 11:3). But secular authors sometimes used it in this kind of context; and it is probably roughly equivalent to other terms used in similar ways in the NT (cp. esp. *mōros* in Mt. 23:17; *anoētos* in Lk. 24:25 and Gal. 3:1; and *aphrōn* in 1 Cor. 15:36). These all connote a lack of understanding, and usually with the implication that the intellectual failure has moral bases or implications. A stubborn, ‘hard-hearted’ ignorance is the general idea. The ‘fool’ of Proverbs may be something of a parallel, although with perhaps greater focus on moral failure.

Moo: James is asking if this foolish man wants to ‘come to know’, ‘be shown,’ that faith without deeds is useless. *Useless* is again a sufficient translation but misses a wordplay in the Greek that is impossible, without great awkwardness, to capture in English.... The Greek word for ‘deeds’ is *erga*, whereas the word for word for ‘useless’ is *argos*, literally ‘not-working’)... Faith that does not ‘work,’ James is saying ‘does not work’ – it does no ‘good’ (v. 14), is ‘dead’ (vv. 17 and 26) and useless.

2. The Picture of Abraham (2:21-24)

Morgan: James shows *first*, that Abraham’s faith was accompanied by works (v. 21), *second*, the fruit of that faith (vv. 22-23), and *third*, a conclusion from Abraham’s example.

a) Abraham’s Works (2:21)

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

MacArthur: The first phrase of v. 21 was a severe stumbling block to Martin Luther. He was so adamantly opposed to the Roman Catholic dogma of salvation through works, and so strong a defender of the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, that he completely missed James’s point here, calling the entire writing ‘an epistle of straw.’ But, ... James was not contradicting the doctrine of salvation by faith. He was not dealing with the *means* of salvation at all, but rather with its *outcome*, the evidence that it had genuinely occurred. After establishing that the absence of good works proves that a professed faith is not real and saving but rather is deceptive and dead, he then emphasized the corollary truth that genuine salvation, which is always and only by God’s grace working through man’s faith, inevitably will be demonstrated outwardly in the form of righteous deeds.

(1) Was Not Abraham Our Father (2:21a)

Moo: James’s appeal to the OT to prove the importance of a ‘faith that works’ is natural in a letter written to Jewish Christians. Equally natural is the appeal to Abraham. For, as James puts it, Abraham is ‘our father’ or *ancestor* (NIV; the word *patēr* can mean both one’s immediate father and one’s more remote ancestor).

MacArthur: Although James’s primary audience was Jewish (see 1:1), the context suggests that his reference to ‘Abraham our father’ is not racial. He seems rather to write of Abraham in the

James – Lesson 6

same spiritual sense that Paul does in several places (cp. Rom. 4:11; Gal. 3:7)... Abraham is the model of saving faith for both Jew and Gentile, a man whose faith was living and acceptable to God.

Morgan: Abraham could not be a more forceful example of faith-plus-works righteousness to his Jewish readers.... No one ever questioned Abraham's faith; to both Jews and Gentiles alike he was the embodiment of faith. He is the 'Father of all who believe' for the Gentile no less than the Jew (Rom. 4:11).

(2) When He Offered Up His Son Isaac on the Altar (2:21c)

Moo: But James is not content simply to mention Abraham's 'works' in general: he makes particular reference to one of the most famous episodes in Abraham's life, the offering of his son Isaac (Gen. 22)... James's reference to this specific story undoubtedly owes something to its use among the Jews of his day. Philo labels the 'offering of Isaac' the greatest of Abraham's 'works.'

Morgan: Thus, with Abraham, faith was shown to be alive not dead, and fruitful, not barren. It should be noted that 'offered up' is from *anenekas* and referred to only the binding of Isaac. He did not carry through with the sacrificial 'offering up,' but he was willing. So, the Scripture from Romans 4 was fulfilled in the case of Abraham.

Moo: The word 'when' in the NIV has nothing directly corresponding to it in the Greek text; it reflects an interpretation of the participle (*anenekas*) 'offering.' That participle might just as well be translated 'having offered,' in which case the verdict of justification would come at some indeterminate time after the offering.

MacArthur: Some have further imagined a contradiction between James's declaration that Abraham was 'justified by works' and Paul's unequivocal teaching that he was justified solely by grace through faith (Rom. 4:1-25; Gal. 3:6-9). Such is not the case, however. James has already emphasized that salvation is God's gracious gift (1:17-18), and in verse 23 he quotes Genesis 15:6, which declares that God imputed righteousness to Abraham solely on the basis of his faith. Also, the specific event James said justified Abraham 'by works' was the offering of Isaac (cp. Gen. 22:9-12)—an event that occurred many years after he was declared righteous by God (Gen 12:1-7; 15:6). James is teaching, then, that Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac vindicates his faith before men—a teaching with which the apostle Paul was in wholehearted agreement (Eph. 2:10). There is thus no conflict between the two inspired writers,

(3) Justified by Works (2:21b)

Moo: In verse 21 James makes Abraham's 'deeds' (*erga*) a cause or instrument (*ex*, the Greek preposition translated 'for' in NIV has this sense here) of his being 'justified.' Thus, arises the famous tension between James and Paul, who appears to contradict James on two key points. First Paul appeals to Gen. 15:6 to prove that Abraham's *faith* was 'credited' to him for righteousness (Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:1-9). Second, Paul insists that Abraham, and people generally, are justified by faith and not by works (e.g., Rom. 3:28). Resolution of the tension between the two writers, we think, is possible when all the relevant factors are taken into account.

MacArthur: Yet James says that the father of the faithful, whose very faith itself was a gift of God (Eph. 2:8) was nevertheless 'justified by works.' That seeming contradiction, which had frustrated and confused believers throughout the history of the church, is clarified by

James – Lesson 6

understanding that justification by faith pertains to a person's standing before God, whereas the justification 'by works' that James speaks of in this verse pertains to a person's standing before men.

Morgan: The passive verb 'justified' directs the reader to God as the active agent expressing the verdict of justification. It is a concept of utmost importance in the New Testament. It involves not just the forgiveness of sin but the declaration by God that we are in right standing with him based on the merits of Christ on our behalf. The verb is aorist, or historical. It records the divine verdict upon Abraham's faith-prompted action.

Hughes: What exactly did Abraham do in offering up Isaac? Genesis 22 gives the full account, and we must note as we look at this experience that the offering of Isaac took place a full *thirty years after* Genesis 15:6.... Genesis 22...reveals the deeds of Abraham and his well-deserved heavenly approval. Because of this, James argues Abraham was 'justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar,' for his righteousness was demonstrated for all to see. His works in offering Isaac gave immortal testimony to the reality of the faith and righteousness that had infused his life for over thirty years.

b) Abraham's 'Justification'

(1) Declaration of Innocence

Moo: Most Christians take their understanding of the verb 'justify' from the writings of Paul; and naturally enough, for he gives the term a theological prominence that is foundational for biblical theology and for soteriology. Specifically, Paul uses 'justify' (*dikaioō*) to denote God's initial judicial verdict of 'innocence' pronounced over the sinner who trust Jesus Christ in faith. But we must not assume that James, writing before Paul, uses the word in the same way. In fact, ... two meanings for the verb appear more likely for James.

MacArthur: It is important to understand that the Greek verb *dikaioō* ('justified') has two general meanings. The first pertains to acquittal, that is, to declaring and treating a person as righteous. That is its meaning in relationship to salvation and is the sense in which Paul almost always uses the term (cp. Rom. 3:24, 28; 5:1, 9; Gal. 2:16; 3:11, 24; Titus 3:7).

(2) Vindicate in the Judgement

Moo: First, *dikaioō* might mean 'vindicate in the judgment.' The verb occurs 44 times in the LXX, usually in legal settings.... For example, in Mic. 6:11, the Lord warns that he will not acquit (*dikaioō*) the man 'with dishonest scales.' ... The general trust of the OT, therefore, is that men are declared to be in the right *on the facts, i.e.*, because in general or in a specific manner they *are* upright, and innocent.... Judaism maintained the same basic viewpoint: a person's 'righteousness' (Gk. *dikaiosynē*, a word from the same root that 'justify' is from) is related to correct conduct, as defined by God's law, and the verdict of justification was pronounced over those who faithfully observed the covenant stipulations.... If James uses the verb with this sense, then he will be claiming that the ultimate vindication of the believer in the judgment is based on, or at least takes into account, the things that person has done. So, 'justify' in Paul refers to how a person gets into relationship with God, while in James it connotes what that relationship must ultimately look like to receive God's final approval.... Tentatively...we adopt [this] meaning of the verb, according to which James is asserting that Abraham was granted a positive verdict in the judgment of God on the basis of his pious acts.

James – Lesson 6

(3) Vindicate or Demonstrate Righteousness

Moo: But a second meaning of *dikaioō* should also be considered. In a few passages, this verb has the sense ‘demonstrate to be right,’ ‘vindicate’ (cp. Mt. 11:19; Lk. 7:35)... On this reading, James would be claiming that Abraham was ‘shown to be right’ by his actions: his prior acceptance by God (Gen. 15:6), the ‘righteousness’ that he had already attained by faith, was demonstrated in his deeds of obedience.

MacArthur: The second meaning of *dikaioō* pertains to vindication, or proof of righteousness. It is used in that sense a number of times in the New Testament, in relation to God as well as to men (cp. Rom. 3:4; 1 Tim. 3:16; Lk. 7:35)... It is the second sense in which James uses *dikaioō* in 2:21, asking rhetorically, ‘Was not Abraham our father justified by works?’ He explains that Abraham’s supreme demonstration of that justification occurred ‘when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar,’ which...happened many years after his justification *by faith* recorded in Gen. 15:6. It was when he ‘offered up Isaac’ that the whole world could perceive the reality of his faith, that it was genuine rather than spurious, obedient rather than deceptive, living rather than dead.

Dorani: How then is Abraham justified by works? ... In James...the word ‘justify’ still has a judicial sense. But here justify is *to vindicate*, whereas in Romans, to justify typically means to declare righteous.... Abraham’s ‘work’ of offering Isaac vindicates God’s declaration that he believes, so that his faith is correctly ‘counted to him as righteousness’ (v. 23)... Abraham is justified—declared righteous—by his works. His works confirm God’s declaration that he is a man of God. His works complete his faith, showing it is genuine.

MacArthur: Abraham was not a perfect man, either in his faith or in his works.... But James’s point is that, in the overall pattern of his life, Abraham faithfully vindicated his saving faith through his many good works, above all else by offering Isaac. When a man is justified before God, he will also prove that justification before other men. A man who has been declared and made righteous will live righteously. Imputed righteousness will manifest practical righteousness. In the words of John Calvin, ‘Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone.’

c) Abraham’s Faith (2:22)

²²*You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;*

Dorani: For Christians raised on Paul, this is astonishing language. How can James say Abraham’s faith was ‘working with his works’ (NASB) or ‘completed by his works’ (ESV). James says, ‘A person is justified by his works and not by faith alone’ (2:24, ESV, NASB). But Paul says: ‘If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”’ (Rom. 4:1-3; quoting Gen. 15:6).

(1) Faith Working with Works (2:22a)

Moo: Abraham’s faith, James now makes clear, is presupposed throughout the argument. Moreover, he probably had Gen. 15:6 in mind from the outset. James focuses in v. 21 on Abraham’s works because it is this aspect of the patriarch’s life that he needed to highlight for his rhetorical purposes.... The NIV translation obscures another wordplay in the Greek, captured well by the NASB: ‘you see that faith was working with (*synērgei*) with his works (*ergois*).’ ... James’s point is not so much that Abraham’s faith produced his works as that his faith and works

James – Lesson 6

cooperated together. The end of that cooperation is not stated in this verse, but we can assume from v. 21 and v. 23 that it is justification. Both the NASB and NIV (*were working together*) bring out the continuous force of the tense that James uses with this verb (the imperfect). He therefore emphasizes that Abraham's faith was not confined to a mental reorientation at the time of his 'conversion' or to an occasional verbal profession, but that it was an active force, constantly at work with his deeds.

Morgan: Second, James shows the *fruit* of that faith.... Every person has to come to the realization that true faith manifests itself in action.... The fruit of Abraham's faith is expressed in a threefold way. *First*, his faith was 'perfected' by his deeds. A careful use of tenses helps to form James' emphasis here. 'Faith was working' (*sunērgēi*) is an imperfect verb that suggests continuous, ongoing action.

Hughes: The imperfect tense of 'was active' tells us that his faith was not an isolated event in the offering of Isaac, but that faith and works were continual characteristics of Abraham's life before and after that event. The faith chapter, Hebrews 11, tells us that he started in faith (Heb. 11:8), sojourned in faith (Heb. 11:9), and sacrificed in faith (Heb. 11:17). Once he had come to trust in God, his subsequent works produced a beautiful ongoing synergism of faith and works.

MacArthur: It is not that salvation requires faith *plus* works, but that works are the consequent outgrowth and completion of genuine faith.... When a person is born again through saving faith and is given a new nature by God, he is given the genetic structure, as it were, for producing moral and spiritual good works. That is the sense in which faith is 'perfected.' It produces the godly fruit for which it was designed (Eph. 2:10). Just as a fruit tree has not fulfilled its goal until it bears fruit, so also faith has not reached its end until it demonstrates itself in a righteous life. That is the sense in which Abraham was justified by works. His unreserved willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the only son of promise, was the works by which his justification by faith was demonstrated and made manifest before men.

(2) Faith Completing Works (2:22b)

Moo: James's second assertion about Abraham's faith in this verse stands in careful balance with the first: 'faith cooperates with works' – 'work complete faith.' A chiasmic pattern of faith – works – works – faith is also evident. But in what sense can it be said that works 'complete' faith? ... The verb (*teleioō*) means 'complete a task or mission' (e.g., Jn. 17:4; 19:28; Acts 20:24), to 'bring to perfection or maturity' (Phil. 3:10; Heb. 2:10). No NT text has the same combination of words that James uses here (the verb *teleioō* with the preposition *ek*).... Abraham's faith, James suggests, reached its intended goal when the patriarch did what God was asking him to do.

Morgan: 'Perfected' is from the Greek *ekteleiōthē*, an aorist tense verb that carries the idea of completed action. So, his ongoing works resulted in his faith being perfected and proven to be legitimate.

Hughes: Thus, 'faith was completed by his works'—not because his faith had been defective or imperfect, but because it was completed by the successive 'tests' that it underwent. In time, Abraham's faith reached its intended maturity.

d) Abraham's Results (2:23)

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.

James – Lesson 6

Moo: James sees in v. 23 the result of the dynamic cooperation between Abraham’s faith and works that he described in v. 22. These results were two: the Scripture about Abraham’s faith being credited to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6) was ‘fulfilled; and he was called ‘the friend of God.

(1) Justification (2:23a)

²³...and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—

Moo: It is likely that Gen. 15:6 has been in his mind from the beginning of his discussion of Abraham. In this famous OT text, Abraham’s faith is specifically his complete trust in God with reference to the Lord’s promise that he would have a natural descendant (vv. 4-5). In response, God ‘credits’ Abraham’s faith to him as righteousness.... The specific wording of the text suggests...that this ‘crediting’ of righteousness to Abraham meant to account to him a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him. Paul’s citation of this text in Galatians 3 and Romans 4 picks up on this idea, as the apostle uses Abraham to show that God graciously accords the forensic status of righteousness to sinners who do not deserve it (see esp. Rom. 4:3-5).

Moo: James, however, uses Gen. 15:6 with a very different – some would even say contradictory – purpose. For he sees this verse ‘fulfilled’ in the cooperation of Abraham’s faith and works.... What he is suggesting is that Abraham’s faith, in its relationship to righteousness, found its ultimate significance and meaning in Abraham’s life of obedience. When Abraham ‘put faith in’ the Lord, God gave him, then and there, the status of a right relationship with him: *before* he had done works, *before* he was circumcised. This is Paul’s point about Abraham (Rom. 4:1-17). But the faith of Abraham and God’s verdict of acquittal were ‘filled up,’ given their ultimate significance, when Abraham ‘perfected’ his faith with works. It is after the greatest of those works, cited by James in v. 21, that the angle of the LORD reasserted God’s verdict: ‘now I know that you fear God’ (Gen. 22:12).... It is not the timing, but the fact of God’s declaration of Abraham’s righteousness that James is concerned with. Abraham’s works, especially his offering of Isaac, reveal the character of his faith, a faith that is crediting for righteousness. When that righteousness is conferred is simply not an issue for James here.

Morgan: *Second*, the Scripture was fulfilled concerning Abraham’s justification.... James wanted to show that Abraham’s faith was not an idle, passive matter. The Scripture to which he alludes is Genesis 15:6, but in Genesis 22 Abraham demonstrated the active, tangible nature of his faith. We stated earlier that James and Paul were in agreement regarding the basis of justification before God. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 in his arguments for justification by faith in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6. ‘Accounted’ could also be translated as ‘imputed’ or ‘reckoned.’

MacArthur: ‘Fulfilled’ does not refer to a fulfillment of prophecy but rather to fulfillment of the principle that justification by faith results in justification by works. James here cites the same text Paul used in his potent defense of justification by faith (Rom. 4:2-5).

Hughes: Genesis 15:6 is the locus classicus of the Old Testament on salvation through faith alone. It is not surprising then that Paul quotes it twice in arguing that all who are justified must be justified by faith alone (Rom. 4:1-5; Gal. 3:6-7).... James’ point is that where there is real faith, there will be in ineluctable outworking of it in life. *Genuine faith results in works.* The

James – Lesson 6

authenticity of Abraham's Genesis 15:6 experience of faith meant an inevitable outworking in life that all would see—for example, in the offering of his only son.

Doriani: James is aware that Genesis 15 teaches justification by faith; he cites the passage in James 2:23. Even if James wrote his epistle before Paul wrote Galatians and Romans (as many scholars believe), he knows that Paul taught justification by faith. He knows Abraham looked at the stars, believed, and thus was justified before God. But James also knows that Abraham's faith demonstrated its vitality by its works.... Works are not the ground of grace, but they are grounded in grace and faith.

(2) Friend of God (2:23b)

—*and he was called a friend of God.*

Moo: The second result of the cooperation between Abraham's faith and works is that *he was called the friend of God*.... The words are nowhere found in the OT. James probably derives the title 'friend of God' for Abraham from Jewish tradition where it was fairly widespread.... But the ascription has its roots in the OT, where Abraham is called the 'beloved' of God (2 Chr. 20:7; Is. 41:8; see also Is. 51:2; and Dan. 3:35 in the Septuagint). James cites it as an indication of the privileged status Abraham was given on account of his deep faith and practical obedience.

Morgan: A *third* fruit of his faith is that Abraham was 'called a friend of God.' ... 'Friend' is from *philos*, a designation used only after Abraham demonstrated his willingness to obey God in verse 22. ... What greater expression of justification could one receive than to be called God's friend?

MacArthur: Due to his belief and resulting obedience, Abraham 'was called the friend of God.' What dignity, honor, and joy! Because his faith was genuine and was therefore manifested and proven, he entered the wonderful fellowship of those whom God calls His friends.

Hughes: Ultimately, the progress of Abraham's faith won him the divine sobriquet 'friend of God'—an astounding title.... The infinite Creator of the universe calls us, His finite creatures, his *friends*. This is sublime reality for those who are justified by faith and who grow in good works (cp. Jn. 15:14-15).

e) Abraham's Example (2:24)

²⁴*You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

Morgan: *Third*, James draws a conclusion from Abraham's example.... The conclusion he draws is that faith and works are inseparable. Any profession of being justified by faith must be proven by the works of the one making such a profession. James rejects a 'faith' that remains alone and produces no works. He insists upon a working faith.... John Calvin summarizes, 'Faith alone justifies, but faith that justifies is never alone.'

Hughes: James would have been shocked if anyone suggested that he was arguing for salvation by works. He simply saw faith and works as inseparable.... James would say we are justified by faith alone (*sola fide*) but not by faith that is alone! He would say that if your faith is alone, you are in the grip of an eternal illusion and would urge you to experience real faith—a faith that works!

Doriani: We understand that when James says Abraham was 'justified by works' he does not mean Abraham *obtained salvation* or earned God's favor by works. Abraham was justified, that

James – Lesson 6

is, declared righteous in God’s court, the day he believed.... Jesus says the children of Abraham do the deeds of Abraham (Jn. 8:39). Those who abide in the vine, that is, in Christ, keep His commands and love one another. But fruitless branches are cut off (Jn. 15:1-17). Paul denies that anyone can be saved by works (or ‘works of the law’). But he stresses the need for good works as much as Jesus and James do. A Christian must translate his new identity into moral action, actions both James and Paul call ‘works.’

Moo: This verse is the center of James’ discussion of faith, works, and justification (vv. 21-25). Its importance is dictated by the shift from the indirect argument of vv. 21-23, where he engaged in debate with an imaginary interlocutor, to the direct appeal to his readers in v. 24: *You* [plural] *see*. In vv. 21-23, James has shown from the life of Abraham that works are intimately connected with faith and that they are also involved in what he calls ‘justification.’ He now brings these three key concepts together in a terse theological summary: *a person is justified by what he does and not by faith only*. By speaking generally of a ‘person’ (*anthrōpos*), James highlights the programmatic character of this assertion (for parallels, see Mt. 4:4; Acts 4:12; Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16). The NIV ‘what he does’ is yet another variant translation of the term ‘works’ (*erga*) that James highlights throughout this passage. ‘Justify’ will have the same meaning that it did in v. 21: God’s final declaration of a person’s ‘innocence’ before him at the time of the judgment. The present tense – ‘is justified’ – is used not because the activity is ongoing at the present time but because James is presenting a timeless truth.

Moo: If this verse represents the heart of James’s teaching about justification, it is also the lightning rod in the theological controversy between James and Paul. The tension between Paul and James is evident when we set beside each other key statements about justification from each author:

James 2:24:	A person	is justified	by works	and not by faith alone
Rom. 3:28:	A person	is justified	by faith	and not by works of the law

Moo: The addition of ‘alone’ shows clearly that James refers to the bogus faith that he has been attacking throughout this paragraph: the faith that a person ‘claims’ to have (v. 14); a faith that is, in fact, ‘dead’ (vv. 17 and 26) and ‘useless’ (v. 20). This faith is by no means what Paul means by faith. He teaches that faith is a dynamic powerful force, through which the believer is intimately united with Christ, his Lord. And since faith is in a *Lord*, the need for obedience to follow from faith is part of the meaning of the word for Paul. He can therefore speak of ‘the obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5) and say that it is faith working through love’ that matters in Christ (Gal. 5:6). This is exactly the concept of faith that James is propagating in this paragraph. Once we understand ‘faith alone,’ then, as a neat summary of the bogus faith that James is criticizing, we can find no reason to expect that Paul would have any quarrel with the claim that ‘faith alone’ does not justify.

Moo: However, we are still left with an apparent contradiction between James and Paul: the former claims that works are a necessary basis or means of justification; the latter denies that works can have any place in justification.... Resolution of the tension can come only when we recognize that James and Paul use ‘justify’ to refer to different things. 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 relation with God only by faith (Paul), the ultimate validation of that relationship takes into account the works that true faith must inevitably produce (James).

James – Lesson 6

3. The Picture of Rahab (2:25)

Moo: It is as if, in v. 24, James suddenly interrupted his dialogue to turn to his readers and make his point clear to them, only to resume the dialogue thereafter.... James's appropriation of the story is quite straightforward. He unambiguously identifies Rahab as a 'prostitute' (*pornē*); although he differs from the Septuagint of Joshua 2 in referring to the 'spies' as 'messengers' or 'envoys' (*angeloi*). While James does not specifically mention Rahab's 'faith,' it can certainly be inferred both from the OT itself and from the parallel with Abraham.

a) *Who Rahab Was (2:25a)*

²⁵*And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute...*

MacArthur: The second person James uses to illustrate justification by works stands in stark contrast to Abraham. She was a woman, a Gentile, and a prostitute. Abraham was a moral man; she was an immoral woman. He was a noble Chaldean; she was a degraded Canaanite. He was a great leader; she was a common citizen. He was at the top of the socio-economic order; she was at the bottom. Yet 'Rahab the harlot' is listed along with Abraham in the great gallery of the faithful (Heb. 11:8, 17, 31) and was even in the human lineage of Jesus, being the great-grandmother of David (Mt. 1:5).

Morgan: To give another example of faith expressing itself through works, James uses a person least likely by a Jew to be called upon: Rahab. It is as if James feels that he needs to complete the argument by marshalling forth a quite common person to serve as an example of saving faith.... James deliberately designed the greatest conceivable contrast to the godly patriarch Abraham. Abraham was a Jew; she was a Gentile. He was a man; she was a woman. But Hebrews 11:31 honors here as a woman of faith.

Hughes: It was conceivable that some of James' readers might take exception to his argument, saying that Abraham is an unfair example because he is such a towering figure in the history of religion, a man whose position and accomplishments set him far above the level of normal humankind. Perhaps for contrast, James now introduces the case of Rahab.... Abraham was a patriarch, Rahab a prostitute. He was moral, she was immoral. He was the original Jew, she a Gentile woman. He was upwardly mobile, she lived in the gutter. Nevertheless, Rahab developed a towering faith.

Dorani: James likes illustrations. He surely had his audience with him when he chose Abraham to illustrate that real faith works and is effective Godward. Abraham was a hero of the Jewish people.... Many regarded him as the most righteous man in history. But James's readers might not have been so receptive to his next illustration. James introduces Rahab the harlot as evidence that genuine faith is *effective manward*. Rahab is a surprising example, since she is a minor and unsavory figure, who contrasts sharply with Abraham. Abraham is the father of Israel, a male, and a great patriarch. Rahab is a Canaanite, a foreigner, and a disreputable prostitute. Yet Rahab illustrates real faith, for an intellectual conversion to orthodox ideas would not have saved her. She had to act.

Moo: A larger question is why James chooses Rahab for his illustration when other, more illustrious examples were ready to hand.... A...perhaps sufficient answer is that James wanted variety. So, alongside the famous and celebrator ancestor of the Jewish people, a man, the 'friend of God,' he places an obscure Gentile woman of low moral character. Thus, he implies that anyone is capable of acting on his or her faith – whether a patriarch or a prostitute.

James – Lesson 6

b) *What Rahab Did (2:25b)*

...justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

MacArthur: Rahab not only acknowledged that the God of Israel was the true Lord, but she obviously trusted in Him (cp. Jos. 2:9-12). Although she doubtless knew nothing of salvation as Christians understand it, or even as the ancient Israelites understood it, her heart was right before the Lord, and He graciously accepted her faith for righteousness. He also accepted her protection of the spies as an act of obedience to Him.... As with Abraham and every other true believer, imputed righteousness based on faith resulted in practical righteousness reflected in good works. Her outward life of faithfulness manifested her inner life of faith.

Dorani: When Rahab went up to them [the spies], she disclosed her motivation (Jos. 2:9-11).... That *sounds* like faith, but we know her faith was genuine by her works. Rahab *acted* on her faith.... Rahab's faith led to action. She welcomed the spies, hid them, and sent them safely away because she believed the God of Israel lives. She risked her life, therefore she gained it. Thus, Rahab shows that real, living faith is *effective manward*. Her deeds were not especially notable. At one level, we see nothing but a clever deception. She did not do much, but she did *what* had to be done, *when* it had to be done. One could even say the world needs more Rahabs.... She did not earn her salvation, but her works did vindicate her potentially dubious claim to believe. Her works publicly announced that she was indeed a God-fearing woman.

Morgan: Despite her less-than-upright vocation, she became a heroine of faith in Jewish tradition.... She confessed her faith clearly in Jos. 2:11. And she acted on that faith by harboring the Jewish spies who came to her city and sent them out by a safe way. As simple as her story of faith was, it was a faith that demonstrated itself in a tangible manner. By using such contrasting examples, James showed the necessity of proving one's faith by deeds. In fact, Rahab found herself a place in the genealogy of Jesus (Mt. 1:5)!

4. The Principle (Yet) Again (2:26)

²⁶*For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

Morgan: 'Just as' (*hōsper*) brings us again to James' 'circling fashion' as he closes his argument with a concluding verdict. Creed and conduct cannot be separated any more than the body can be separated from its very life-breath and still be called alive. 'Breath' is from *pneumatōs*, and many commentaries render it 'spirit.' We need not take the space to argue which is better – in the end, the result is the same: a corpse and not a living body! With this verdict James touches the root of the whole matter. The relationship between faith and works is like that between the body and its breath. Without breath, the body is a corpse. Without works, faith is dead. Religious words without accompanying works are worthless.

MacArthur: James...likens dead faith—professed faith without works—to a body without the spirit. Both are useless, devoid of any life-giving power. It is a sobering reality that all who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will not be saved (cp. Mt. 7:21-23).... Aware of that fearful truth, Paul urged, 'Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith: examine yourselves!' (2 Cor. 13:5). Abraham and Rahab stand for all time as examples of those whose living faith passed the test.

Hughes: The examples of Abraham and Rahab are sufficient for his argument, so James rest his point with a concluding axiom.... Faith without action, even if embalmed in a beautifully profound creedal statement, is a decaying corpse.

James – Lesson 6

Moo: James rounds off the passage by reiterating its central point: faith without works is dead. This final reminder harks back to the similar assertions of vv. 17 and 20. From a literary standpoint, though, the connection with v. 20 is particularly important, these two verses creating a ‘frame’ around the faith/works/justification dialogue. The comparison of faith without works to *the body without the spirit* is intended by James as a general analogy.... The *spirit* here is the life principle that animates the body (cp. Gen. 2:7; Lk. 8:55; 23:46; 1 Cor. 7:34) – without the spirit the body ceases to be. In the same way, James suggests, faith that is not accompanied by works ceases to be. It becomes mere profession and has no claim to biblical faith. We again emphasize that James is not arguing that works be ‘added’ to faith, but that one possesses the right kind of faith, a ‘faith that works.’

Hughes: Two things are clear from Holy Scripture. First, *salvation is by faith alone*. When ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’ (v. 23, quoting Gen. 15:6), the faith alone principle was established for all time (cp. Gal. 3:6-7; Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8-9).... Scripture teaches that the human race is dead in its trespasses. Attempting a works salvation is no more effectual than putting makeup on a corpse or rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. Sinners must come to Christ with faith plus nothing. The second thing that Scripture is clear about is that *salvation is by a faith that is not alone*. James, the New Testament’s moral theologian, says it every way he can (2:14, 18b, 20, 24, 26).... James understands that real faith, the kind Abraham came to in Genesis 15:6 is *potent*. It always and continually produces good works. That is the whole point of the *Hall of Faith* in Hebrews 11, which also is a *Hall of Works*.

5. The Precis

Doriani: So, Paul and James agree. In God’s court, believers are justified the moment they believe. When thy trust in Christ as Lord and Savior, their sin is laid on Christ and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to them. Yet works also justify in this secondary sense: they vindicate God’s declaration that we are right with Him. They prove that we are alive in Christ. When we say a believer is justified by faith alone, we mean that the believer adds nothing—no works—in order to earn or gain God’s favor. Good works *are* necessary—not a condition prior to salvation but a consequence of following salvation. Just as a healthy tree by its very nature necessarily bears fruit, so a genuine believer necessarily performs good works as the fruit of a new nature. Real faith is *effectively Godward*.

Doriani: To put it schematically, there are four ways to view the relationship between salvation and works. The arrow means ‘produces’ or ‘results in.’

- 1) Works → Salvation
- 2) Faith + Works → Salvation
- 3) Faith → Salvation
- 4) Faith → Salvation + Works

Doriani: View 1 says if we do enough good works, they produce salvation by earning God’s favor. View 2 says that if we believe *and* perform works, we obtain salvation. View 3 says that faith results in salvation. View 4 says faith leads to salvation and works follow. No Christian adheres to view 1. Official, traditional Roman Catholic theology adheres to view 2, and many ordinary Catholics follow that teaching. Some evangelical Christians support view 3 because they think it is possible to confess faith in Christ, unto salvation, without accepting Him as Lord. They believe it is good, but not absolutely necessary, to accept Christ as Lord. But the entire

James – Lesson 6

New Testament teaches that while we are saved by faith alone, real faith is never alone. Works are a necessary result of spiritual life (view 4).

Hughes: It is pleasantly ironic that Martin Luther, who said such disparaging things about James, has given us in his preface to Romans, as clear an expression of the ideas of James as anyone:

Moo: Somewhat ironically, no one has captured the basic message of James 2:24-26 more forcefully than Luther (from his preface to *Romans*):

Oh, it is a living, busy, active, might thing, this faith: and so, it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question arises, it has already done them, and is always at the doing of them. He who does not these works is a faithless man. He gropes and looks about for faith and good works and knows neither what faith is nor what good works are, though he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.

[DSB: play 'Screen Door' by Rich Mullins.]

For next time: Read James 3:1-12.