

“Faith’s Litmus Test”

James 2:14-26

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(Faith and Works; Genuine Christianity; Social Concerns/Justice)

Several months ago, I was listening to our local NPR affiliate, KCFR and heard one of those non-commercial commercials that ended with these words: “Judaism your way!”

They were serious, and I went online to see what else they might say and found this: Judaism your way: “We’re not here to tell you who is Jewish and who is not. We’re not here to tell you how to observe Judaism the “right” way... We’re a place for you to connect **on your terms.**”

(www.judaismyourway.org)

I can understand why a fast food restaurant says you can have it your way, but a religion? - I was honestly nonplussed.

Then I wondered, “Is that not what many have done with Christianity?”

In America haven’t we in fact allowed people to define Christianity “on their terms?”

Several years ago *Leadership Magazine* published a cartoon; it was a church marquee, which advertised the following:

24% fewer commitments

Home of the 7.5% tithe

15-minute Sermons

45-minute worship services

Only 8 Commandments – your choice

Everything you’ve ever wanted in a church ...and less!

Leadership, Summer, 1983, 81

So what is a Christian? Is it whatever you want it to be?

Someone says, “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross for my sins. I asked him into my heart when I was 10. Am I a Christian?”

Another says, “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross for my sins. I asked him into my heart when I was 10. Since that time, I don’t know if I still believe all of that. Am I a Christian?”

Still another: “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross for my sins. I asked him into my heart when I was 10. **I still believe all of that** but I readily acknowledge that I don’t have any real interest in Jesus setting the course of my life or of obeying what the Bible says on some things. Don’t get me wrong, I think murder is wrong but when the Bible says I need to give a significant portion of my money away or that I shouldn’t do certain things I enjoy, I see no reason to do what it says. Am I a Christian?”

And yet another: “I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross for my sins. I asked him into my heart when I was 10. Since that time I’ve worked hard at knowing what the Bible says and being careful to maintain moral integrity but this stuff about me caring for widows and orphans, me feeding the poor and me changing my lifestyle to do so, I don’t get too worked up about that. Am I a Christian?”

With those scenarios, I have raised several issues:

- What is the essence of saving faith?
- Am I still a Christian if I **choose** from the Bible what I’ll obey or not obey?
- If I’m orthodox in my beliefs and moral in my lifestyle, can I still be a Christian if I’m not all that concerned about caring for the poor and social justice?

I’m certain that many of you have heard that the Bible “comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.”

Well James certainly does the latter!

He makes us very uncomfortable.

He does so by challenging the **genuineness of our faith** if it isn’t evidenced by works of charity toward others.

Please stand for the reading of God’s Word:

I'm reading from the New International Version (NIV).

On the screen in front of you, you will notice that I have included the English word "works" in several places where the NIV translates the Greek "ergon" as "deeds," "action," "do," "does," and "did."

That Greek word is most literally translated "work" or "works."

It is possible that the NIV translators wanted to soften the apparent contradiction with Saint Paul by using very legitimate but different words.

James 2:14-26 "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds (works)? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action (works), is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds (works)." Show me your faith without deeds (works), and I will show you my faith by what I do (works). ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰ You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds (works) is useless? ²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions (works) were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did (works). ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does (works) and not by faith alone. ²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did (works) when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds (works) is dead."

Those of us reared on Evangelicalism's emphasis on salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and not of works, find this passage to be troublesome.

It is especially troubling for us who have recently been studying Paul's letter to the Romans where Paul writes in 3:28 "For we

maintain that a man is justified **by faith** apart from observing (works of) the law.

It sounds to us as if James is contradicting Paul.

But that is not the case.

First, because James was most likely written before Paul ever penned Romans or Ephesians, James wasn't arguing with Paul.

Secondly, James is emphasizing a different aspect of Christianity than Paul is.

Paul, in texts we will look at later, is emphasizing how one **becomes** a Christian; James is describing how genuine Christianity is **lived out**.

But before we look at the relationship of faith and works, I want to remind you of the context of these verses.

As I said, James is not having a theological debate with Paul.

Instead, James is concerned about describing genuine Christianity.

Specifically he's concerned about those whose so-called Christianity is not demonstrated in their relationships with the poor and disadvantaged.

We see that throughout the letter:

In the first paragraphs: 1:9-10 "The brother in humble circumstances...the one who is rich..."

In the next section of his letter he addressed the difference between mere appearance and reality – James 1:22 "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Then in James 1:27 he says it "point blank:" "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

In the paragraphs we looked at last week he says it again, James 2:8 “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right.”

And as we have already seen, he continues that theme in our text today with the very first illustration he uses to make his point:

2:15-16 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

So while we will digress to reconcile James’ statements with Paul’s, it appears that James’ concern is that genuine faith results in charity.

But first we will look at the relationship of faith and works.

With two rhetorical questions James clearly points out that a faith that doesn’t result in works is not genuine saving faith.

James 2:14 “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?”

His answer is in verse 17 “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

James says there are people who claim to have faith, they claim to be Christians, but ***their kind*** of faith is “dead,” worthless faith, and unable to save them.

What is ***their kind*** of faith? What is this **so-called** faith that is worthless?

James has already described it one way saying it is a faith that is not accompanied by action (works).

I think James says, if love for others, especially others in need, doesn’t flow from this faith, then it is not saving faith.

In verse 18, James says ***their kind*** of faith is the kind that defines faith as unconnected to deeds (works).

James 2:18 “But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

- This person wants to separate faith and deeds.
- They want to separate justification (becoming a Christian) from sanctification (living as a Christian).
- They say there are two separate pieces of the Christian experience – getting saved and living as one.
- They argue that you can be truly saved even though there is no fruit of it.

In today’s language there are those who argue that there are three kinds of people: unsaved people, worldly Christians and spiritual Christians

Misunderstanding 1 Corinthians 3, they suggest, as I said, that there are two kinds of Christians – worldly and spiritual.

They will argue that both are truly Christians, it is just that worldly Christians aren’t living as they should.

Too many times I have heard this kind of theology especially at funerals.

Some well-meaning Christian friend or family member will say of the deceased, “I know he didn’t live like a Christian but I’m so glad that he asked Jesus into his heart when he was a child.”

Or, “He wasn’t really into the Bible or going to church and stuff but he believed in Jesus.”

What is James’ response to that kind of thinking?

Verse 19 “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”

Genuine faith is more than knowledge!

Knowing that God exists and even knowing that Jesus died on the cross for sins is not true saving faith.

Genuine faith certainly includes knowledge of the truth but **it also includes assent, agreement with that truth.**

But genuine faith is more than knowledge and assent or agreement.

Even the demons know and agree that God is God so much so that they “shudder.”

They live in fear but in their stubbornness they won’t trust him.

Knowing that God exists and even knowing that Jesus died for sins and then even assenting or agreeing with the fact that Jesus died for your sins is not true saving faith.

One person wrote, “It is a good thing to possess an accurate theology, but it is unsatisfactory unless that good theology also possesses us.” (Milton in Moo, James PNTC, 130)

True saving faith is more than knowledge (the mind) and assent (the heart); it also includes trust (the will).

Saving faith embraces the person of Jesus – we trust him.

Several different NT words are used for this three-fold faith:

“Believe,” “receive,” “accept,” and “trust.”

You see, they speak of much more than merely knowing or even agreeing – they speak of embracing, yielding to, and attaching yourself to.

This is not merely a mental exercise; this is a relationship.

Now James’ point is that this relationship **looks like something**.

If a faith-relationship doesn’t result in a different life, a changed life, then it only proves that what someone called faith was not genuine saving faith.

Beginning with verse 20 James gives two illustrations to prove that faith without works is not real faith.

And those of us who are familiar with the Apostle Paul’s writings find James’ illustrations and wording troubling.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”

And then Paul wrote in Romans 4:1-3 “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture

say? “Abraham ***believed*** God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”?

But James writes, James 2:21-24 “Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous ***for what he did*** when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete (reached its goal) by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.”

How many times have you heard me and others repeat the great Reformation theme, I cited earlier, that the gift of *salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone?*

So who’s right, Paul or James? They both are!

I want you to see that James and Paul are using Abraham to make two different points.

And they will use the same words but in different ways.

James 2:23 quotes the same Genesis 15:6 verse that Paul quotes in Romans 4:3.

But the earlier illustration about the offering of Isaac that James uses to make his point about Abraham’s righteousness is from Genesis 22, which came later in Abraham’s life.

Paul is describing the initial righteousness or justification of a sinner. And Paul’s purpose is to declare that that righteousness, that declaration of justification, that new right standing with God, is by grace through faith and it is not, in any way, earned by works, by what we do.

James, however, is describing the on-going righteousness, the faithfulness, of a saved sinner.

Have you ever heard the saying, “I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved?”

Obviously that saying has to do with not only the initial coming to faith in Jesus, but also the on-going results of that faith and the final outcome of it.

We sometimes speak of it as justification, sanctification and glorification.

So with this word righteousness: I have been declared righteous, I am being declared righteous and I will be declared righteous.

When Paul uses the term, he most often uses it to refer to that initial justification which we often refer to as being “saved.”

But in Matthew 12:37 Jesus used the word of a future declaration of righteousness. “For by your words you will be acquitted (declared righteous), and by your words you will be condemned.”

In Matthew 25 and in Revelation 20, the Bible speaks of a future judgment when believers will be publicly recognized and declared as righteous.

What has been true of them will be announced by God as true.

Now here in James, he is using the word “righteousness” to refer to God’s **present** declaration of Abraham’s right standing with God.

Abraham **had been** declared righteous by God when, in Genesis 15:6 Abraham believed God, placed his faith in God and it was credited to him for righteousness.

James, in verse 23, acknowledges that, but in verse 20 James is referring to a later time when by Abraham’s faithful actions God declares him righteous.

To James’ point: Saving faith results in works.
No works, means no faith.

Someone might misunderstand verse 21 to suggest that Abraham was declared righteous only by what he did, as if faith were not even part of it.

But in verse 22 James corrects such a possible misunderstanding.

He writes, “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”

It wasn't works versus faith.

James here proves that Abraham's faith was not the mere knowledge and assent that some call faith.

Abraham's real faith, including knowledge, assent and trust, expressed itself in obedience.

Again remember that James is not describing initial justification, he describing the results of genuine faith and justification.

When James says that Abraham's **faith was made complete**, he doesn't mean that it wasn't faith until it was coupled with works;.

He means that **by his obedience Abraham made complete or reached the goal of his faith** – faith results in obedience.

Similarly, in 1 John 4:12 we read "If we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us."

It doesn't mean that God's love is incomplete or lacking until we love but that one goal of God's love is that we love one another.

So in James 1:22, it is not that faith is not genuine until it is joined with works but that genuine faith always reaches its goal in good works.

Probably the most difficult verse for us is James 2:24 "You see that a person is justified by what he does (erga, works) and not by faith alone."

I think we understand Paul and James when we realize, "Paul (was) dealing (as one man said it) with obstetrics, with how new life begins; James, however, is dealing with pediatrics and geriatrics, with how the Christian life grows and matures and ages." (Francis Taylor Gench, *Hebrews and James*, 106)

As others have said it, "Where Paul denies the need for pre-conversion works, James emphasizes the absolute necessity of post-conversion works." James calls a "faith" that does not bring about a changed life dead, lifeless, and useless. (Such faith) does not work to save a person, (because) it cannot, lacking life itself. "A 'faith' which is purely doctrinal and does not result in pious action (i.e.

charity) is a dead sham, totally useless for salvation.” (Martin, Moo and Davids in Blomberg, 159)

But as we have pointed out so many times, Paul **also** deals with this on-going life of a believer and he is in complete agreement with James when he writes:

Romans 1:5 we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to **the obedience that comes from faith.**

Galatians 5:6 “The only thing that counts is **faith expressing itself through love.**

Ephesians 2:8-10 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works,** which God prepared in advance for us to do

The Apostle John declares the same:

1 John 3:7-10 “Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.⁸ He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”

Luther, the champion of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, wrote,

“O it is a living, busy active mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are.” (Luther in his preface to Romans).

That is what James is talking about.

Now let's return to the context and the application of this text:

James has declared that if you claim to be a Christian and you claim to have faith but it doesn't result in good works, you are only fooling yourself; your faith is spurious, worthless, in fact it is dead.

And even more to the point of the larger context, James says that if our faith doesn't result in charity toward the poor and disadvantaged, it is a false faith.

The illustration James uses is consistent with what he has been teaching all along in his letter:

James 2:15-16 "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"

There are at least three dimensions to true Christianity:

First is "**Doctrinal orthodoxy**" – we believe true things about God. Our doctrinal statement is biblical. We believe the right things.

But if our Christianity stops there, it is no better than the bogus faith James describes here.

There is a second dimension to genuine Christianity: "**Moral integrity**."

Paul said it this way, 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 "Flee from sexual immorality...Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you...You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."

Many Christians desire to carefully obey God's laws and as James said it, "keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

But that is where it stops with too many of us.

We are orthodox and moral but uncharitable!

James, consistent with all the rest of Scripture, also emphasizes that third dimension of genuine Christianity: **Merciful Actions**.

We evangelicals pride ourselves on orthodoxy and we talk much about morality, but we too often let the liberals deal with charity rationalizing that we don't want to get trapped in works-righteousness.

James punctures our self-deception and says that a faith that doesn't result in mercy and charity is no faith at all.

The illustration continues James' concern for the poor among us. Instead of giving him anything, we bless him ("Go in peace").

We see the situation for what it is (a person in need) and we do nothing other than what costs us nothing – we bless them.

"I'll pray for you!" Hope something changes. I hope God blesses you (soto voce – "because I don't plan to.")

One man wrote, "It is not the form of the statement (the blessing) that is reprehensible, but its functioning as a religious cover for the failure to act." Johnson in Blomberg, 158

Another wrote that we are those who have "studiously learned the art of dismissing socio-economic disparities that may at times be glaring but remain unseen due to class blinders well in place. The poor, the homeless, the ex-convict, or the street beggar merely receives a perfunctory 'greeting' as the Sunday-only comfortable Christian hurries by, scarcely seeing the needy 'neighbor.' While it is true that one can get killed trying to be the good Samaritan today, this possibility is no warrant for distancing oneself from virtually every opportunity to extend Christian mercy" (Keenan, *The Wisdom of James*, 83. in Felder, "James," 1795 in Blomberg, 176)

Several times in April and now again in May we are presenting you with opportunities for involvement in the lives of those who are in need.

Consistent with Paul's teaching, we don't do these things to merit God's favor but, consistent with James' teaching, we do them as an outgrowth of the grace of God in our lives, as acts of obedience to our Lord.

But you might say, “What if I have no desire and I only feel obligation? Doesn’t that ruin it?”

Obedience isn’t always preceded by feeling but by choice.

I can choose to obey not out of fear but out of commitment, out of a relationship?

For example, my wife asks me to get up in the night to get her some medicine.

I don’t have to pretend I like getting up, but I can choose, for her sake, to do it.

When it comes to charity, do I hide behind the fact that I pay taxes that in our country we redistribute the wealth through taxes and therefore I am helping the poor when I pay taxes?

Do I also hide behind the fact that I give more to charity than most Americans when I give to my church, which has a benevolence committee, and thus I am doing my part?

Do I also hide behind the fact that we have a division of labor in the church? I can’t do everything and I invest time and energy in some kinds of ministry to people (teaching and leading) while others invest time in prison ministries or feeding the poor.

Do I also hide behind the fact that so many efforts toward helping the poor are fruitless?

I and two other pastors started Mile High Ministries; many of you served with me in tutoring, refurbishing buildings, landscaping, serving meals, and all apparently for nothing.

We want to fix the situation and when we find that we can’t, we tend to give up.

Deuteronomy 15:11 says “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.”

Jesus didn’t ask us to fix it; He asked us to be generous!

One man wrote, “Our faith becomes practical when it is expressed in two books: (our appointment) book and (our) checkbook.” (Elton Trueblood

cited in Baker and Ellsworth, *Preaching James*, 76)

I have struggled with this text all week; what will I do about it?

What if instead of trying to protect time for hobbies and recreation, I made serving others was my hobby, my recreation?

It doesn't have to mean either/or but it probably means cutting back on the protected personal time.

Maybe it means:

Meals to those in difficult situations;

Child-care for a mom in distress;

Helping a single mom move;

Visiting someone in the hospital at those inconvenient times;

Tutoring a child;

Visiting someone in prison;

Making donations and helping at a food bank;

Inviting a lonely person or a new family over for dinner and conversation;

Just random acts of kindness;

Helping build a house for a needy family (Habitat for Humanity;

Mexico trips; and others)

Driving the bus to pick up the developmentally disabled;

We criticize those liberals who think they can **work** their way to heaven by doing good.

Worse, are those supposed evangelicals who think they can **faith** their way to heaven without the good works that prove the genuineness of their faith.

James 2:14-26 "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds (works)? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action (works), is dead."

Additional Notes:

Outline of James 2:14-26:

Questions: 2:14

Hypothetical Illustration: 2:15-16

Conclusion 2:17

Objection: 2:18a

Response: 2:18b-26

1st response 2:18b-19

2nd response 2:20-26

Historical illustrations: Abraham 2:21-24, Rahab
2:25

An analogy 2:26

Conclusion 2:27 reiterates 2:17

Additional commentary on 2:14-26:

James 2:14

The KJV translation left out an article that is very helpful in understanding this passage – “the,” “this,” “that” before “faith” in “Can (the, that) faith save him? In the second question, James is referring to the kind of faith he has already mentioned in the first question. So the NIV and other translations are right when they translate it, “Can SUCH faith save him? (The kind of faith a man claims to have when there are no deeds consistent with it.) This “faith” is no faith at all.

“James is not seeking to downgrade the importance of ‘faith’ in 2.14-26. On the contrary, faith retains its role as the primary distinguishing feature of the community. But as the prophets of old had denied the efficacy of sacrifice without obedience, so faith without works is

dead.” Martin, *James*, 80. Donald J. Verseput (“Reworking the Puzzle of Faith and Deeds in James 2:14-26,” *NTS* 43 [1997]: 115) In Blomberg, 155 footnote:

“Save” in James, unless otherwise specified, refers to the whole concept of salvation from initial induction into God’s family (regeneration/justification), through sanctification, to glory (glorification) itself.

2:15-17

Here James expands on the first question he asked in 14 – “What good is a deedless faith?”

James asks, “What good is it?” implying it is worthless.

Matthew 25:42-43 “For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

Verse 17 draws the conclusion: Just as a blessing accomplishes nothing for the naked and hungry so faith without works accomplishes nothing – v14 it doesn’t save.

2:18a

James quotes someone else – a person who wishes to consider justification and sanctification as divisible.

2:18b-19

James responds in 18a-19.

“Show me your faith without deeds” Either James is challenging him to demonstrate his faith without works, something which the man can’t do OR James is simply setting the stage for proving that it is only by works that real faith is demonstrated.

In either case, James does say that real faith is demonstrated by action.

I think James wholly disagrees with the following statement: “When one becomes a Christian, he consciously believes in Christ. He does not need, nor is he required, to will a commitment to obedience, though he may do so.” **Frank B Minerty**, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1993—

Volume 6:11

2:20

“foolish” = hard-hearted ignorance – willful lack of understanding.

As in Romans 1:21 “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

2:21

Here is the shift from hypothetical examples earlier in this text to historical ones here.

The word “righteousness” is used differently by Paul and James:
 Paul: Righteousness as a legal standing – justified, declared not guilty.

James: Righteousness as the description of an approved life lived in obedience.

2:22

James uses this Genesis 15:6 text differently than Paul did.

Paul’s point was that before Abraham had done anything, specifically before he was circumcised, he was declared righteous by faith.

But James indicates that this righteousness was filled up, perfected, by Abraham’s obedience.

Verse 21 didn’t suggest that Abraham was working apart from faith. It wasn’t works versus faith.

Abraham’s faith is presupposed throughout verse 21 and specifically mentioned in v23.

James here proves that Abraham’s faith went further than mental assent that God is one (v19).

NASB “Faith was working with his works” in contrast to verse 20 “works that don’t work.”

“James’s great contribution to the Christian life is not on the doctrine of justification, but in helping us to see that true faith is radical obedience.” (Townsend in Blomberg 180)

2:23

“Paul is promoting faith apart from the *Law*, while James argues that Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac shows that he really did believe God and the promise of descendants for him.” Blomberg, 169)

“It appears certain that James is speaking of the manifestation, not of the imputation of righteousness, as if he had said, Those who are justified by faith prove their justification by obedience and good works, not by a bare and imaginary semblance of faith. In one word, he is not discussing the mode of justification, but requiring that the justification of all believers shall be operative. And as Paul contends that men are justified without the aid of works, so James will not allow

any to be regarded as justified who are destitute of good works... Let them twist the words of James as they may, they will never extract out of them more than two propositions: That an empty phantom of faith does not justify, and that the believer, not contented with such an imagination, manifests his justification by good works.” (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2:115)

When did Abraham attain the status of “righteous?”

“Perhaps this is to ask the wrong question of James. 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.” Moo, 139

“This choice of the word “righteousness” recalls Pauline language, where it regularly referred to the imputation of right standing before God through faith in Christ. James, however, is closer to the OT use of righteousness as equivalent to *hesed* or “covenant faithfulness.” Blomberg 169

2:24

“This verse does stand in stark contrast to Rom 3:28, even without the word “alone” explicitly in Paul’s Greek. But again it is essential to remember the distinction between James’ and Paul’s use of the words “faith,” “works” and “justify” in these two contexts, so that no insoluble contradiction emerges. As Joachim Jeremias famously epitomized it, Paul speaks of Christian faith (trust in Jesus) and Jewish works (obeying the Law so as to justify oneself), whereas James refers to Jewish faith (pure monotheism) and Christian works (good deeds that flow from salvation). Or as Frances Gench nicely phrases it, “Paul is dealing with obstetrics, with how new life begins; James, however, is dealing with pediatrics and geriatrics, with how Christian life grows and matures and ages.” What James describes as the *end result* of justification bringing a person to maturity or “completion” (using the verb *teleioww*), Paul acknowledges in Philippians 1:6 when he expresses his confidence that “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to ‘completion’ (from the related verb *ejpiteleuvw*) until the day of Christ Jesus.” (in Blomberg, 171)

Other Resources on Faith that Works – Christ as Savior and Lord -

Arguments that connect justification and sanctification - Jesus as Savior and Lord:

MacArthur, John, *The Gospel according to the Apostles – The Role of Works in the Life of Faith*, 2000 (see especially “Appendix 3 Voices From the Past”)

Horton, Michael, *Christ the Lord – The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*, 1992 See especially chapters 3 (Kim Riddlebarger’s essay “What is Faith”) and 7 (Paul Schaefer’s essay “An American Tale” an historical overview of the Lordship question).

Arguments that divide justification and sanctification - against “Lordship Salvation:”

I find the following works to be wholly unconvincing in the face of the NT evidence and the overwhelming commentary on this subject by Christian scholars for 2000 years.

Hodges, Zane , *Absolutely Free*.

Hodges, Zane, *The Gospel Under Siege*

Hodges, Zane, *The Epistle of James* (For an assessment of Hodges treatment of the book of James see D.A. Carson in *Exegetical Fallacies*, 137)

Ryrie, Charles, *So Great Salvation*

When we speak of being “declared not guilty,” “justified,” etc we must realize that those words speak not only of initial justification (Paul in Romans 3 and 4 and Ephesians 2:8-9) but also of eventual “justification” at the final judgment.

I John 4:15-17 “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷ In this way, love is

made complete among us so that **we will have confidence on the day of judgment**, because in this world we are like him.

Hebrews 9:27 “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

Matthew 12:36 “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

Matthew 25 The judgment where Christ separates the sheep and the goats.

Westminster Shorter Catechism

“At the resurrection, believers, raised in glory, will be publicly recognized and declared not guilty on the day of judgment...”

Revelation 20 The books are opened and those whose names are found in the “lamb’s book of life” are judged acquitted.

The relationship of justification and sanctification (even faith and works):

“Sanctification...is the inevitable result of that vital union with Christ which true faith gives to a Christian. ‘He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.’ (John 15:5). The branch which bears no fruit is not living branch of the vine. The union with Christ which produces no effect on heart and life is mere formal union, which is worthless before God. The faith which has not a sanctifying influence on the character is no better than the faith of the devils. It is a dead faith, because it is alone. It is not the gift of God.”
J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 17

“He (Paul in Galatians 5:6) says that what counts with God is the kind of faith that by its nature produces love. But **it is faith that gives us our right standing with God**. The love that comes from it only shows that it is, in fact, real living, justifying faith.” John Piper, August 8, 1999

“James is not seeking to downgrade the importance of ‘faith’ in 2.14-26. On the contrary, faith retains its role as the primary distinguishing

feature of the community. But as the prophets of old had denied the efficacy of sacrifice without obedience, so faith without works is dead.” In Blomberg, 155 footnote: Martin, *James*, 80. Donald J. Verseput (“Reworking the Puzzle of Faith and Deeds in James 2:14-26,” *NTS* 43 [1997]: 115)

“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 that, because it is inherently defective, produces not works and a faith, that, because it is genuine does result in action.” (Moo, *James PNTC*, 126)

When did Abraham attain the status of “righteous?”

“Perhaps this is to ask the wrong question of James. 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.” Moo, 139

“This choice of the word “righteousness” recalls Pauline language, where it regularly referred to the imputation of right standing before God through faith in Christ. James, however, is closer to the OT use of righteousness as equivalent to *hesed* or “covenant faithfulness.” Blomberg 169

“But if you ask them, “Does justification as an ongoing and final right standing with God depend on the works of love?” Paul is going to say, “No, if by works you mean deeds done to show that you deserve God’s ongoing blessing (the point of Romans 4:4).” And James is going to say, “Yes, if by works you mean the fruit and evidence of faith like Abraham’s obedience on Mount Moriah.” And Paul is going to say, “I agree with the James, based on his definitions.” And James is going to say, “I agree with Paul, based on his definitions.” “So when Paul renounces “justification by works” he renounces the view that anything we do along with faith is credited to us as righteousness. Only faith obtains the verdict, not guilty, when we become Christians. Works of any kind are not acceptable in the moment of initial justification. But when James affirms “justification by works” he means that works are absolutely necessary in the ongoing life of a Christian to confirm and prove the reality of the faith which

justifies. For Paul, "justification by works" (which he rejects) means "gaining right standing with God by the merit of works." For James, "justification by works" (which he accepts) means "maintaining a right standing with God by faith along with the necessary evidence of faith, namely, the works of love." To put it yet another way: When Paul teaches in Romans 4:5 that we are justified by faith alone, he means that the only thing that unites us to Christ for righteousness is dependence on Christ. When James says in James 2:24 that we are not justified by faith alone he means that the faith which justifies does not remain alone. These two positions are not contradictory. Faith alone unites us to Christ for righteousness, and the faith that unites us to Christ for righteousness does not remain alone. It bears the fruit of love. It must do so or it is dead, demon, useless faith and does not justify. The glory of Christ in the gospel is not merely that we are justified when we depend entirely on Christ, but also that depending entirely on Christ is the power that makes us new, loving people. Depending entirely on Christ is how we are justified and how we are sanctified. Paul struck the one note. James struck the other. Both are true and together they bring Christ the glory due his name. (Piper, August 8, 1999)

“This seems to contradict texts like Rom 4:2-4 and Gal 3:6, until we realize that **Paul used Abraham as an example of faith providing initial justification, while James uses this example to refer to final, eschatological justification.** Thus James shows that Abraham was able to prove his faith as real because he was willing to act on it, so that he was brought to salvation at the end. (Blomberg, 166)

“Faith is not repentance, nor obedience, nor does it include them as component parts. This is why Protestants have insisted upon faith alone. And this is why Protestants have been careful in how they have used the classical categories of knowledge, assent and trust. Faith alone justifies, hence sola fide. The faith that saves is a faith that involves the mind, the heart and the will. The whole person turns to Christ through faith. Thus, the type of ‘dead’ faith that James is talking about is not lacking information, nor lacking orthodoxy, nor lacking obedience, but lacking genuine trust in Christ himself. The threefold distinction is supported by the biblical data... Faith links us

to Christ. It is through faith that we are united to him. And thereby, we receive his saving benefits by grace through faith. The Reformed, then, have historically linked faith, repentance and obedience together, not calling the latter two elements within saving faith itself, but understanding them as corollaries within the *ordo salutis*. That is, one who has exercised faith in Christ, and is united to Christ by that faith, will repent and will struggle to obey and yield. But these things are not conditions for, nor component parts of, faith itself. They are 'effects' – signs that there has been an exercise of saving faith." (Kim Riddlebarger in Michael Horton, Chapter 3 of *Christ the Lord*, 103-104)

When we become Christians do merely believe Jesus as Savior or do we embrace Jesus as saving-Lord?

See the following suggested prayers for salvation:

Prayer in Billy Graham's Steps to Peace with God 2008

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayer in Navigators' Bridge Illustration 2008

Dear Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as the Lord and Savior of my life. In Your name. Amen.

SoundLiving.org:

Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am weaker and more sinful than I ever before dared to admit, but through you I am more loved and accepted than I ever before dared to hope. I thank you for paying my debt on the cross, taking what I deserved in order to offer me complete forgiveness. Knowing that you have been raised from the dead, I turn from my sins and trust you as my Saving-Lord. Amen.

Now see the call to conversion from those who believe there must be no call to Lordship in the salvation message:

Grace Evangelical Society

Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the whole world (John 1:29). He has removed the sin barrier, which separated us from God. However, we still lack spiritual life, eternal life. To get that life, we must simply believe in Jesus for it. There are no strings attached. Our eternal salvation is "not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:9). Simply believe in Jesus and He guarantees you will never die spiritually. You will go to heaven when you die, and spend eternity in God's kingdom. It really is that simple.

Fellowship Bible Church Colorado Springs (a Grace Evangelical Society church)

You become a Christian by: 1. Realizing that you (along with all people) have sinned and fallen short of God's standards. 2. Personally believing that Jesus Christ, who was God in human flesh, died for your sins on the cross and rose again.

R.B. Thieme Bible Ministries

"Eternal life is available to you, right now. In the privacy and freedom of your soul, you can tell God the Father that you are believing in Jesus Christ, and that is the moment of eternal life."

Frank Minirth, formerly of Minirth-Meyer Clinics

"When one becomes a Christian, he consciously believes in Christ. He does not need, nor is he required, to will a commitment to obedience, though he may do so." Frank B Minerty, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1993—Volume 6:11

What others say on the subject of receiving Jesus as saving-Lord:

Is? it enough to know and understand and assent to the facts of the gospel – even holding the 'inward conviction' that these truths apply to me personally – and yet never shun sin or submit to the Lord Jesus?" (MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, 141)

“So, too, while not claiming to know everything that Christ will require of a believer throughout life, James would most assuredly insist that it counts for nothing to claim to accept a free gift of salvation without transferring one’s allegiance to Jesus as the Ultimate Master of one’s life and possessions. It is precisely those people who *do* make this claim who incur the scorn of devotees of other religions that recognize the need to do good in the world, thereby making it *harder* for such people to discern and accept authentic Christianity!”
(Blomberg, James 178)

Dr. Darrell Bock (Dallas Theological Seminary) debate with Dr. Bob Wilkin (Grace Evangelical Society) at Dallas in mid 1990s at www.faithalone.org/resources

Bock: “Paul does not think of the gospel merely as a ticket of escape from wrath. It is so wonderful because it is entry into a new, freshly enabled life. That life is not a condition of salvation; it is part of the gift that is the gospel....

To seek forgiveness is to ask for clean relationship with God, which is why baptism pictures the moment of faith. With one comes the other. I can distinguish them, but I cannot divide them. Both are part of the gospel which comes to me by the gift of His grace. To want forgiveness but not relationship with God is not a response to the gospel. This is what I seek and receive by faith: forgiveness and entry into life that lasts into eternity...

I am comfortable with the term “Lord” as a term of saving confession because it appears in contexts where the gospel offer and response is described in the New Testament... The title “Lord” in the gospel is not merely a way to say God. It is a title acknowledging God’s authority over the salvation process. In the ancient world, to confess someone as the divine lord was to recognize his authority and rights. “The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” To call Him our Lord and to call upon the Lord who delivers says much about the nature of my relationship to Him as I come to Him for life...

Four, I’m also comfortable using the term “repentance” as another way to talk about a faith response. God’s word treats it as an

adequate summary term for our message, or at least our response to it... Repentance, then, is more than changing your mind about Jesus. For to change your mind about who He is and what He had to do to gain my forgiveness on the cross, is to understand my need and the heinous nature and price of sin in a new way. Thus, the language of turning is also an adequate rendering for what this response of faith entails. (Acts 26:19-20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9)...

So we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in God's unique Son (John 3:16). I trust this Christ, calling upon Him as Lord, because He has authority, which I acknowledge in my calling out to Him, to forgive my sins, bring me into incorporated relationship with Him through His Spirit, and give me eternal life. He died that I might live. My faith response represents a change of direction -- a turning to Him because I now appreciate that sin costs and separates. I trust Him because I understand sin. I trust Him because I need Him. Thank God that He gives those coming to know Him the grace to appreciate this offer and cry out for it in faith. Thank God He seals the deal with His Spirit, providing enablement that I formerly lacked. Don't sell God's grace short. The gospel is rich in its benefits."

Dr. Bob Wilkin in same debate:

"How do we get the gift of eternal life? What is the condition? In terms of the condition, the gospel is by faith alone. Stated simply, Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him for it. Without any reference ... as you noticed the verses I mentioned ... no reference to turning from sins, no reference to commitment of life, no reference of promising to serve God, no reference to entering into a life-transforming relationship, no reference to persevering in faith and in godly practice ... simply believing in Him. The gospel is that simple: Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him...

Dr. Bock: "My fundamental argument is that justification and sanctification are distinguishable, but they are not divisible.

Bill Webster "Lordship Salvation – Biblical or Heretical"

Webster is pastor of Grace Bible Church (Reformed Baptist) of Battle Ground, Washington.

<http://www.christiantruth.com/lordshipsalvation.html>

What will be the result in the life of a person who truly repents and believes? The result will be a totally changed life. The overall bent or direction of the life, from the heart attitudes and motivations to the outward behavior, completely changes. Where the life used to be centered around self and the pursuit of selfish interests, it is now centered around Christ and His interests.

No Christian will live a perfect life, but the desire of the heart—the practice or habit of the new creature in Christ—is to know and do the will of God. The issue is not perfection, but a changed life. If a person's life has not been fundamentally changed from one of self centeredness to one of living for the will of God, then that person has never come to know Jesus Christ. The evidence of true conversion is a changed life.