

980111 AM James 2.14-26

JAMES 2:14-26

"SEVEN VITAL SIGNS OF LIVING FAITH"

This morning our passage in James is all about genuine, reliable, life changing and soul saving faith.

Faith DISPLAYS itself in godly works is the thesis of this loving pastor's letter.

As he writes guided by the Holy Spirit his words are like the guidelines posted in an emergency room or in a rescue vehicle.

James gives us "SEVEN VITAL SIGNS OF LIVING FAITH".

Living Faith puts on Christ. Saving faith in action looks like Jesus in its actions. The only proof of life according to James is lived out faith, displayed in godly works.

This is the obligation of every believer: "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:14). The goal of the Christian life is Christ-likeness.

I wonder if you have read¹ that moving story of Jerome K. Jerome's called *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*? Roughly, the tale is of a poor-class lodging house, where lived a heterogeneous company of needy and seedy folk, and where there was a poor, ignorant little servant-girl, a good deal of a slut, and ready to sell her virtue for a worthless trinket.

Into the place there came one day a lodger who at once seemed to be different, and who occupied the third floor back. He quickly revealed himself to have a very kind heart and way. He always had a kindly word for the little servant girl, usually so ignored and downtrodden.

¹ Guy H. King, *Crossing the Border*, Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1974, pp. 92-93.

She almost worshipped him.

As the weeks passed this quiet stranger impacted every one of the tenants. Each of the other lodgers soon owed him much for his many deeds of helpfulness.

He was always doing something for somebody, in his kindly, sympathetic way.

At last the day came for him to move elsewhere. The little maid watched him, open-eyed, as he walked with his bit of luggage to the front door; and as he turned to her with a smile and a gentle pat on the shoulder, she took her leave of him with the words, "Please kind sir, are you 'Im?"

She saw a living, walking, talking display of Jesus. Genuine faith displays itself in godly works. When Peter introduced Cornelius to Christ he described Him in Acts 10:38 "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. NKJV

In our text this morning we see that as Believers, we should so clothe themselves with Jesus Christ that when people look at us, they see Christ.

What did James write as the opening chapter of God's New Covenant people? Simply this, a clear and simple way of life that reflects A MATURING WALK OF FAITH.

As Christ was received by faith, so the way of life flowing from His presence in a life would be reflected in the walk of faith.

So James gives 12 clear indicators of how the walk of faith is going.

You are headed toward Christian maturity when these areas are in line: James: Twelve Tests of Spiritual Maturity (1:4)

James 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. NKJV

1. A Maturing Walk of Faith endures troubles 1:2-11
2. A Maturing Walk of Faith deals with temptation 1:12-16
3. A Maturing Walk of Faith obeys the Word 1:17-27
4. A Maturing Walk of Faith ALLOWS no prejudice 2:1-13.
5. A Maturing Walk of Faith DISPLAYS itself in godly works 2:14-26.

Before James lists the seven vital signs of living faith he notes there are three kinds of faith, only one of which is true saving faith.

DEAD FAITH (James 2:14–17)
DEMONIC FAITH (James 2:18–19)
DYNAMIC FAITH (James 2:20–26)

DEAD FAITH (James 2:14–17) As Jesus had warned, James was seeing – counterfeit Christians. Even in the early church there were those who claimed they had saving faith, yet did not possess salvation. Wherever there is the true, you will find the counterfeit.

- Jesus warned, “Not every one that saith unto Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Jesus said a sign of dead faith is substituting words for deeds. Counterfeits know the correct vocabulary for prayer and testimony, and can even quote the right verses from the Bible; but their walk does not measure up to their talk.
- Jesus and James warn, beware of a mere intellectual faith. No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same any more than he can come into contact with a 220-volt wire and remain the same. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12). Saving faith is life changing faith. Dead faith is not saving faith. Dead faith is counterfeit faith and lulls the person into a false confidence of eternal life.

DEMONIC FAITH (James 2:18–19) How much can you believe and still be lost? Too much. So much that it can scare you, make you shudder and still not save your soul. James introduces Damning Demon Faith . James wanted to shock his complacent readers, so he used demons as his illustration. Here is just a bit of what Satan and his demons believe:

1. They believe in a Literal Creation because they sang and watched God do the work of fashioning the heavens and the earth. Job 38:7 When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?NKJV
2. They believe in a literal Adam and Eve because Satan himself tempted them in the garden. 2 Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.NKJV
3. They believe in a Global Flood believers because they tried to mess up the human race and God destroyed the world and started over with Noah. Jude 6 And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;NKJV

4. They believe in a literal Exodus miraculous plagues and all because they witnessed the exodus as they were working through the Egyptian magicians. Exodus 7:11 But Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers; so the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. NKJV
5. They believe in Job because they afflicted him. Job 2:7 So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. NKJV
6. They believe in Daniel because they filled the magicians with envy and tried to destroy him. Daniel 5:11 "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. NKJV
7. They certainly believe in Jesus Christ: His virgin birth, life, ministry, deity and work on Calvary. At every step they confessed Him:
 - Mark 1:24 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" NKJV
 - Mark 3:11 And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God." NKJV
 - Mark 5:7 And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me." NKJV
 - Acts 19:15 And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" NKJV

DYNAMIC OR LIVING FAITH (James 2:20–26)

First, James gives THE DESCRIPTION of true saving faith. James already explained in chapter 1 that dynamic or saving faith is *based on the Word of God*.

- We are born again through God's Word (James 1:18).
- We receive the Word and this saves us (James 1:21).

Second, James gives THE DETAILS of true saving faith. He explains that it is based on God's Word, and *it involves the whole man*.

- Dead faith touches only the intellect; demonic faith involves both the mind and the emotions; but living faith involves the will.

- The whole person plays a part in true saving faith. The mind understands the truth; the heart desires the truth; and the will acts upon the truth.
- Finally, James gives THE DEMANDS of true saving faith *leads to action*.
- This obedience is not an isolated event: it continues throughout the whole life. It leads to works.
 - Abraham was not saved by obeying God's difficult command. His obedience proved that he already was saved. "You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did" (James 2:22, NIV). There is a perfect relationship between faith and works. As someone has expressed it, "Abraham was not saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that works."

SO WHAT ARE THE SEVEN VITAL SIGNS OF LIVING FAITH ?

1. LIVING FAITH CHANGES THE HEART: v. 14
2. LIVING FAITH PROMOTES GENEROSITY: V.16
3. LIVING FAITH PRODUCES FRUIT: V. 17
4. LIVING FAITH DISPLAYS ITSELF BY WORKS: V. 18
5. LIVING FAITH BELIEVES GOD: V. 19
6. LIVING FAITH OBEYS GOD: V. 21
7. LIVING FAITH LOVES GOD: V. 23

Now lets listen as James describes and lists them in our passage:

1. LIVING FAITH CHANGES THE HEART: v. 14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

We are not saved by faith plus works; we are saved by a faith that leads to works. Galatians 5:6, "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (NIV)

The priest and Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan each had extensive biblical training, but neither of them paused to assist the dying man at the side of the road (Luke 10:25–37). Each of them would *defend* his faith, yet neither *demonstrated* that faith in loving works.

2. LIVING FAITH PROMOTES GENEROSITY: v.16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you

do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me” (Matt. 25:40). To help a person in need is an expression of love, and faith works by love.

The Apostle John emphasized this aspect of good works. “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and truth” (1 John 3:17–18, NIV).

3. LIVING FAITH PRODUCES FRUIT: v. 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

The great theologian, John Calvin, wrote, “It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.” True saving faith can never be by itself: it always brings life, and life produces good works. Remember our Lord’s image of the mustard seed? A seed is a picture of life and growth. The mustard seed is very small, but it has life in it and, therefore, it can grow and produce fruit (Mark 4:30–32). If our faith is a *living* faith (James 2:14–26), it will grow and enable us to obey God’s commands.

4. LIVING FAITH DISPLAYS ITSELF BY WORKS: v. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

The person who claims to be one of God’s elect, but whose life has not changed, is only fooling himself. *Those whom God chooses, He changes*. This does not mean they are perfect, but they are possessors of a new life that cannot be hidden.

It has been said, “We are not saved by faith plus works, but by a faith that works.” If the Thessalonians had continued to worship their dead idols while professing faith in the living God, it would have proved that they were not among God’s elect. *Salvation changes the life*. How did Paul know that these Thessalonians were elected of God? He saw a change in their lives. If you put 1 Thessalonians 1:3 next to 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10, you can get the picture: your work of faith - you turned to God from idols; your

labor of love - to serve the living and true God; and patience of hope - to wait for His Son from Heaven.

5. LIVING FAITH BELIEVES GOD: v. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

One night, God showed His servant the stars and gave him a promise, "So shall thy seed [descendants] be!" How did Abraham respond? "And he believed in the Lord, and He [the Lord] counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:5–6). The word *counted* is a legal or financial term; it means "to put to one's account."

All of us are sinners. Like Abraham, our spiritual bankbook was empty. We are all born spiritually bankrupt! But he trusted God, and God put *righteous* on Abraham's account. Abraham did not work for this righteousness; he received it as a gift from God. He was declared righteous by faith. He was justified by faith (read Rom. 4).

6. LIVING FAITH OBEYS GOD: v. 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

Justification is an important doctrine in the Bible. Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross. It is not a process; it is an act. It is not something the sinner does; it is something God does for the sinner when he trusts Christ. It is a once-for-all event. It never changes. How can you tell if a person is justified by faith if this transaction takes place between the sinner and God privately? Abraham's example answers that important question: the justified person has a changed life and obeys God's will. His faith is demonstrated by his works.

7. LIVING FAITH LOVES GOD: v. 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she

received the messengers and sent them out another way?26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. NKJV

Rahab heard the Word and knew that her city was condemned. This truth affected her and her fellow citizens so that their hearts melted within them (Josh. 2: 11). Rahab responded with her mind and her emotions; but she also responded with her will: *she did something about it*. She risked her own life to protect the Jewish spies, and she further risked her life by sharing the good news of deliverance with the members of her family.

It is important that each professing Christian examine his own heart and life and make sure that he possesses true saving faith, dynamic faith. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5a). Satan is the great deceiver; one of his devices is imitation. If he can convince a person that counterfeit faith is true faith, he has that person in his power. Here are some questions we can ask ourselves as we examine our hearts:

1. Was there a time when I honestly realized I was a sinner and admitted this to myself and to God?
2. Was there a time when my heart stirred me to flee from the wrath to come? Have I ever seriously been exercised over my sins?
3. Do I truly understand the Gospel, that Christ died for my sins and arose again? Do I understand and confess that I cannot save myself?
4. Did I sincerely repent of my sins and turn from them? Or do I secretly love sin and want to enjoy it?
5. Have I trusted Christ and Christ alone for my salvation? Do I enjoy a living relationship with Him through the Word and in the Spirit?
6. Has there been a change in my life? Do I maintain good works, or are my works occasional and weak? Do I seek to grow in the things of the Lord? Can others tell that I have been with Jesus?
7. Do I have a desire to share Christ with others? Or am I ashamed of Him?
8. Do I enjoy the fellowship of God's people? Is worship a delight to me?
9. Am I ready for the Lord's return? Or will I be ashamed when He comes for me?

“Search me, O Lord, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24). 2

2 Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.