

James 2:14-20 – Talking Your Faith Is Not Living Your Faith

TSK, Lexicon, Gaebelein, Reinecker, Ellsworth, Adamson, Arnold, Geneva, Trapp, PNT, Vincent, Robertson, Gray, JFB, Family, Henry, Calvin, Clarke, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Most Canadians say they are Christians. Many people believe most Canadians are Christians. But God doesn't! They were like many of the people of Apostle James' day. They talked a good talk, but their actions did not match their talk. They showed prejudice against the poor because they could not give them any advantage and they kowtowed to the rich with the hope of getting some advantage. So Apostle James decided it was important to get their theology straight.

This is what you will hear about today.

Our headings are:

There is no faith without works – Stated

There is no faith without works – Illustrated

There is no faith without works - Restated

Our goals are: **That you will work to prove your faith in the Lord Jesus by doing works of mercy and service to those around you.**

There is no faith without works – Stated

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? **Can faith save him?**

1. Apostle James stated it was useless to say one had faith but not have the good works to prove one had faith.

Keep in mind these proofs of faith were not only **good works as worship**, but good works as **caring for widows, orphans, and foreigners, and treating all men, whether rich or poor, justly.**

2. Apostle James stated that their assumed (even confessed) faith, was so useless without the accompanying works, that it had no impact on their spiritual state.

Simply put: **The one who said he had faith, but didn't show it, was lost** and heading to the fires of hell to be tormented forever. They had to face God's justice for themselves.

James had to take this issue head on because the Jews were known for a lifeless faith – a generic faith based on ritual obedience to the law. Apostle Paul warned:

Galatians 2:16 "knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the law** but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; **for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.**

3. So what these people had was not a true faith!

Apostles James just called it "faith" for the sake of the argument. **That type of "faith" could not save.**

4. Lessons:

a. Nice talk, even godly talk, does not fool God. He looks at the heart and he looks at the hands – for godly action. Every good tree has to produce good fruits! No good plant will reject the good sap. **No good plant refuses to bear flower and fruit!**

b. If you've been good at talking the Christian talk, but not walking the Christian walk, and not caring for the widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor, you have to wonder whether you have faith altogether.

c. This does not mean you must do good works to be saved; this means you must do good works because you are saved.

There is no faith without works – Illustrated

15 If a **brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food**, 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?**

1. Apostle James, as a wonderful teacher, then illustrated what he meant by saying Christians' lives had to be marked with real, provable evidence of faith.

2. He said that if you only speak of good wishes to your brother and sister in need, and not help them (and you are bound to help when you have the opportunity) it is evidence of not having true faith.

Caring for a brother or sister **who didn't have proper clothing** (only 1 change of clothing) **or sufficient food** (no food for the day) was requisite of one who had true faith in Jesus. (Remember, this flows from Chapter 1 about caring for the widows, orphans, and foreigners and it flows from the previous verses of Chapter 2, speaking of welcoming the poor man who entered the worship service.)

So saying “May you be warm and filled” was hot air. They should have said, “Here is some warm clothing and a hot meal.” Words had no Vitamins in them. Words didn’t nourish the muscles.

But why did Apostle James mention “brother or sister,” and not “anyone?” He knew brothers and sisters were closer in relations, and if someone did not help his own brother and sister, it is clear evidence of a lack of faith...seen by a lack of love.

3. Apostle James said that talking and not doing profits neither your brother nor you.

On the contrary, acting that way made God angry. Look at what he threatened on Tyre who hoarded and did not show love.

Isaiah 23:18 Her gain and her pay will be set apart for the LORD; it will not be treasured nor laid up, for her gain will be for those who dwell before the LORD, to eat sufficiently, and for fine clothing.

4. Lessons:

a. Saving I am a computer expert and throwing in some technical terms about computers doesn’t making me an expert. I am deceiving myself and gullible people. I have to *show* that I am who I say I am.

b. Many can over-emphasize baptism, church membership, and worship attendance, and at the same time, ignore proper caring for the needy.

Of course showing your faith by caring for the poor does not dismiss baptism, church membership, or worship attendance, but baptism, membership, and worship can’t be the only evidences of faith. Those good works must be attached with caring for the needy who can give you nothing back...as far as gifts of this world go.

RUTHERFORD: “Believing and doing are blood relatives.”

c. Be ready to show your faith. Learn from the example of some of the Chinese who greet each other, even in their poverty with the question: “Have you eaten yet?” That captures the sense of caring for the poor. “Mouth mercy” is cheap mercy! So don’t give sweet words when sweet bread will do.

One more thing: “Good luck” is often a dodge to escape duties.

d. God uses you to be part of the way he provides for the needy. God could provide miraculously, but he often chooses not to do so when he has his children all around.

e. If you can’t give anything (or do anything), be ready to give words of encouragement...real encouragement...not tokens. Be ready to say, “I can’t physically or materially help you, but I want to encourage you, maybe give you a hug, and pray that God will keep you and meet your needs.”

f. It may be that you can talk to others who might be able to help the needy. So don’t wash your hands of the responsibility to your brothers and sisters.

g. If you say you have faith but do not have good works, you are more destitute and more exposed than the poor without clothes.

There is no faith without works - Restated

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

1. Apostle James then started to restate that faith without works is dead faith, not a true living faith as God requires for one to have life.

What can you say of those who say they have faith but they have no works? Their faith is a corpse! That is the literal meaning!

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.

2. Apostle James then rebutted the argument that some may have raised: That having faith and doing works were not tied together but could exist independently.

But faith and works are 2 sides of a coin or 2 sides of a piece of cloth. They are inseparable.

There is no other mechanism for showing faith than good spiritual and good physical works.

Apostle James knew no one could see the heart. So he challenged those who had the view that they could have faith without showing it, to prove they had faith. He was confident they couldn’t prove their faith by their works.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were **judged according to their works**, by the things which were written in the books.

19 You believe that **there is one God. You do well.** Even the demons believe — **and tremble!**

3. Apostle James then continued to restate and prove the essential nature of works of faith and he did so by pointing out that simply stating a truth was not sufficient, as even demons know and confess truths.

What truth did people of Israel and demons know but yet did not have faith? The Shema Israel.

Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

Every Jew confessed with his mouth multiple times every day there was one true God! And yet many did not have faith in Jesus.

Every demon knew there was one true God. But their belief in God did not save them! They believed it as a fact, but nothing more. They even trembled, knowing this. **(The word “tremble” is unique.** “Tremble” means to show a high degree of terror!) So they had a high degree to terror...and still they did not have faith in Jesus.

Matthew 8:29 And suddenly they cried out, saying, "**What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God?** Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

This truth is called a “**transparent absurdity.**” No one could doubt it!

No wonder Apostle James used biting sarcasm: “You do well.” Literally, “You *think* you are doing well.”

20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

4. Apostle James then reminded believers that those who denied the necessity of doing good works to show their faith were foolish men.

Keep in mind the “**fool**” is often used in a theological sense to describe one who **denied God’s existence.**

Psalms 53:1 The **fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”** They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity; There is none who does good.

The literal meaning of fool is “empty.” So Apostle James was saying: **“If you believe the surgeon can do your heart by-pass surgery, lie down on the operating table and show your faith.”**

5. Lessons:

a. When you play cards you may have some idea of what the person has in his hands, but when someone doesn’t have good works, you can know for sure there is nothing there...there is no faith. **You are not a mechanic if you don’t fix cars.** You’re not a pilot if you don’t fly. You’re not a carpenter if you never build anything. And **you’re not a Christian if you don’t do good works.**

b. On the other hand, the true believer will show his faith...must show his faith. His faith, because it results in obedience, cannot be hidden.

c. It is essential if you’ve only been a talker, that you become a doer...a show-er of your faith. Less talk, more actions of faith! That’s God’s requirement.

Conclusion:

Apostle James challenged his readers to show their faith by doing works of faith (works that express that faith) and he condemned those who only talked faith but did not show it. The context was that his readers would show their living faith by caring for poor and needy brothers.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Faith in Jesus is not a blind faith. It is faith in a real Savior who made you and remade you after your fall into sin. He even renewed your will so you could work for him. He equips you with his Word and his Spirit for the task. He wants you to care for the body and souls of his children and for those who are not yet of his flock. (Jn 17)

2. So how obvious is your faith? If the sap is in the tree, it will bear! So worship? Evangelism? Teaching your children? Great. But it must be more! It must be caring for the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. It is welcoming the poor man as part of the family of God. It is helping and defending those who are persecuted for their faith.

Finally: If **you are not a Christian, I hope you see the essential nature of faith to have everlasting life.** If you don’t have faith to receive what Jesus did (and show that faith by obedience), you need to ask God to give you that faith. He gives it for free and it makes you rich – very rich.