

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Epistle of James

(SB_James_Lsn3)

Outline of James

SALUTATION (1:1)

PROLOGUE – RESPOND PROPERLY TO TRIALS (1:2-18)

- Embrace trials (1:2-11)
- Do not blame God (1:12-18)

THEME – BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO WRATH (1:19-20)

BODY OF THE LETTER: CULTIVATING THE BEHAVIOR (1:21-5:6)

- Be Swift to Hear (1:21-2:26)
 - Involves more than listening; involves good works (1:21-27)
 - Demonstrated by impartiality in treatment of others (2:1-13)
 - Demonstrated by the combination of faith and good works (2:14-26)
- Be Slow to Speak (3:1-18)
 - Control the tongue (3:1-12)
 - Conduct demonstrates wisdom (3:13-18)
- Be Slow to Wrath (4:1-5:6)
 - Wrath is created by worldliness (4:1-5)
 - Wrath is cured by humility (4:6-5:6)
 - Humility is demonstrated by repentance from sin (4:6-10)
 - Humility is demonstrated by restraint in speech (4:11-12)
 - Humility is demonstrated by reluctance to boast (4:13-5:6)

EPILOGUE: PERSEVERE IN TRIALS (5:7-20)

- Perseverance will be properly rewarded (5:7-11)
- Perseverance is empowered through prayer (5:12-20)

**The sections highlighted in yellow are the sections covered in previous lessons. The sections highlighted in blue are the sections to be addressed in this lesson.

Summary of Chapter 2

In chapter 1 (see prior session notes), we've examined the context of James' message as it is addressed to Jewish believers in and around Jerusalem during the first ten years or so after Jesus' resurrection. In this chapter, James addresses the subject of how the believer should respond to trials and testing. He deals with the believer's attitude toward the trials (1:2-8) regardless of whether the believer is rich or poor in this world (1:9-11). Then he deals with the believer's attitude toward God when the believer is undergoing testing (1:12-18). He establishes the general outline for his epistle which is that believers should be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath (1:19-20). Finally, towards the end of chapter 1, he begins to elaborate on the first characteristic of believers who are undergoing testing – be swift to hear. Being swift to hear (possessing humility) involves more than just listening or physical hearing with the ears, it involves evidence that one has internalized the Truth through the deeds one performs (1:21-27).

In chapter 2, James begins to deal with some practices within the Jerusalem church in which believers were not demonstrating that they had internalized the Truth. Some believers were treating rich people who had entered the assembly with favoritism or with preference (2:1-13). (These rich people were probably Jews and some might have been believers and some could have been unbelievers as there is indication in James' letter that both were present in the assembly). Chapter 2 of James' letter concludes with an examination by James of the relationship between faith in the life of the believer and deeds (2:14-26). James does teach a justification of one's faith by works in these verses; however, it is important to recognize that he is not dealing with one's faith in Christ's work on the Cross as the payment for one's sin and determination of one's eternal destiny (i.e. phase 1 faith). James is dealing with the daily manifestations of faith in the life of the person who is already a believer – how does the believer evidence his continuing trust in the Lord to others? This is phase 2 faith that accrues experiential (not positional) righteousness.

James uses two illustrations that would have had great significance to the Jews to whom he ministered. First, he uses the illustration of Abraham who was a believer when he offered Isaac on the altar. It is important to note that Abraham was already a believer by the time he offered Isaac on the altar – a fact that is attested by Genesis 17 (the offer of Isaac) following the declaration of Abraham's righteousness in Genesis 15 by a number of years. (Paul the same logic supported by Abraham's life to prove that deeds, i.e. circumcision, are not required for salvation in Romans 4:1-5 and James is very aware that works are not a requirement for salvation as evidenced by his leading the Jerusalem Council in their declaration of the same in Acts 15). Abraham's phase 2 faith as a believer is justified by his deeds.

James next uses the illustration of Rahab, the prostitute, who, because of her phase 2 faith, was delivered (saved physically from harm) and who justified her phase 2 faith by her deeds. She too was already a believer by the time the spies arrived; however, if she had failed to trust the Lord at this critical juncture, she would not have benefited from the deliverance that the Lord provided and she would not have been justified by her deed of hiding the spies in faith.

Exegesis of Chapter 2

Being Swift to Hear is Demonstrated by Impartiality in the Treatment of Others (2:1-13)

2:1 MY brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. 13 For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas 2:1-13)

It is interesting that James ends chapter 1 with examples of what he terms “pure and undefiled religion” to include keeping oneself “unspotted from the world” (v. 27). Worldliness was evidently as big of a problem in these early days of the 1st Century A.D. as it is now. Jews lived in relative peace and prosperity during the first half of the 1st Century A.D. and the new Jewish converts consisted of rich and poor. Chapter 2 provides us with a practical case study of the detrimental impact of worldliness within the assembly of faith as James explains this exhortation with an example from 1st Century life.

Evidently, James had observed believers giving preferential treatment toward the wealthy in the Jerusalem church. It is important to think about the historical context of James’ letter and envision the circumstances. As we’ve seen, this letter is set in the very early years after our Lord’s death, resurrection and ascension and was the earliest letter written that became a book of the New Testament. The Jewish paradigm of interpreting life was still ingrained in the minds of these Jewish believers.

That paradigm included the idea that if one possessed material wealth, it was a sign of blessing from God (e.g. Prov 10:4 – “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.”). Therefore, if a man was wealthy, then almost sub-consciously, a Jewish person would have a tendency to associate the wealth with God’s blessing. Even during my Christian experience, I have known pastors to teach (and believers to understand) that material wealth and fortune was somehow related to one’s mastery of things spiritual – especially if the wealth was owned by a prominent and respected member of the believer community. However, James makes it absolutely clear that worldly wealth has nothing to do with one’s spiritual status and that believers should have a thought pattern based upon eternal values.

It is unclear whether the wealthy individuals referenced by James were believers or unbelievers. At this early date, believers in and around Jerusalem were still meeting in synagogues (“assembly” in verse 2 is from - sunagoge) and there was a mixture of believing Jews and unbelieving Jews who made up the congregation. The wealthy congregants to whom James referred also consisted of a mixture of believing Jews and unbelieving Jews.¹

In our previous study, we examined the connection between James’ exhortation to “be swift to hear” and the concept of humility that is an essential component of the divine power sphere. When the believer possesses humility (teach-ability), then that person’s actions should demonstrate that Truth has been internalized. If Truth has been internalized, then it will eventually be translated into actions involving other people – versus preferential treatment based upon worldly norms per James’ illustration in chapter 2.

We have also observed that when the believer comes to understand his or her identity in Christ and when the believer is operating within the divine sphere of power (vs. human sphere of power) and is living a life of Trust, the believer will have impersonal (or unconditional) love for all mankind that is motivated by a personal love for God.

Therefore, we can easily relate James 2:1-13 to our understanding of the divine power sphere. God does not look upon individuals based upon worldly standards – their worldly acclaim and accomplishments, rather He treats them based upon divine standards – a policy of grace. James simply acknowledges that God’s perspective should be the believer’s perspective if that believer is living a life of Trust and has a personal love for God.

How is this divine perspective towards other individuals possible? The believer who loves God will understand God’s plan for the whole of human history and for man’s salvation

¹ James’ statement in 2:7 that “they...blaspheme the fair name” makes little sense if there were only believers in these early assemblies. James’ statements in 1:9-10 in regard to the wealthy man rejoicing in his humiliation is evidence of believers in the assembly.

(phase 1 – soteriological, phase 2 – experiential, and phase 3 - eschatological). With this information, the believer can be objective about other people and have impersonal or unconditional love toward them. With objectivity, this believer does not evaluate others on the basis of worldly wealth. He or she does not shower flattery upon the wealthy of this world and push the poor of this world aside. He or she knows that the source of all promotion and blessing (temporal, spiritual and eternal) is from the heavenly Father and that all worldly fame is passing.

Armed with these concepts that are built upon a knowledge of Truth, the believer is stable and demonstrates poise. Appropriate respect toward everyone is rendered and undue flattery is unnecessary. When the believer is walking with God within the divine sphere of empowerment that results from a life of Trust (faith) in God in adversity (Jas 1:2-8), then even in the midst of those trials, he or she will demonstrate love for God (Jas 1:12-18) by his or her deeds (Jas 1:21-27).

One of the deeds or works of believers who are so empowered that allows the world to see their faith in action is generosity – generosity with time, money, possessions and affection. Believers who are generous with their resources can only be so as a pattern of life due to the fact that they have a set of values shaped by the eternal versus a set of values shaped by a worldly, temporal perspective (see Lu 14:12-14 cf. Gal 6:9).

12 And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, **“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you. 13 “But when you give a reception, invite *the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,* 14 and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”² (Lu 14:12-14)**

9 And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. (Gal 6:9)

The believer who is not trusting God will inevitably be insecure. The result is that the “unbelieving” believer will resort to human mechanisms for empowerment, e.g. positioning oneself for favor with people possessing worldly power to the neglect or detriment of the needs of poor believers. When faced with the dilemma of choosing between honoring a person of wealth in the hopes of gaining favor and showing deference toward the poor who do not possess power, the untrusting believer will seek power from worldly mechanisms versus God’s empowerment through servitude.

James recognizes the principle that the poor of this world have great potential for spiritual wealth. A wealthy believer of this world usually has less opportunity to trust God for his needs than does a poor man who must trust Him daily and in non-Western cultures, even meal-to-meal. Therefore, a poor Christian may become very wealthy in the area of personal faith in God and the rich Christian may be spiritually poor (see Jas 1:9-11). When the believer is operating within God’s sphere of empowerment (trust, humility, objectivity, personal love for God, momentum in the spiritual walk, and self-sacrificial service towards others), then the believer interprets life from God’s perspective and sees the poor believer of this world as potentially wealthy in eternal value.

A poor believer who gives more attention to spiritual matters will be a greater heir of the kingdom. Just as Jesus inherits the kingdom (Psa 2:8-9) due to His loyalty to God the Father (Heb 1:8-9 quoting Psa 45:6-7), so will the co-heirs of His kingdom (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26-28). The kingdom has been promised to those who love God. Those who truly love God will manifest that love for God in how they treat others – based upon worldly standards or based upon eternal standards. Does it then make sense to show partiality in the way we welcome a rich person (who

² Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are taken from *The New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation, 1977).

may even be an unbeliever) into the assembly while simultaneously slighting a potential heir of the kingdom? As heirs and fellow-heirs of the kingdom, we should conduct ourselves according to the royal law of that kingdom – love for one’s fellow heirs. (See 1 John 4:20-21).

20 If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. (1 Jn 4:20-21)

Does James teach that believers during this age (dispensation) should observe the Mosaic Law in James 2:8-13?

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. 13 For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. (Jas 2:8-13)

In verses 8-13, James is not teaching believers that they should be observing the Mosaic Law. Rather, he is creating an analogy by using an aspect of his Jewish readers’ tradition and history that was held in highest esteem – the Mosaic Law. Essentially, James is calling to mind the fact that when a Jew of the prior age failed in any aspect of the Mosaic Law, then he was guilty. In similar fashion, believers should examine the manner in which they treat other believers of little worldly means since that examination would reveal to them whether they were guilty of not keeping the royal law. If they were not keeping the royal law, then they would be judged according to the law of liberty

Why do I draw this conclusion? Well, for one, the structure of the passage supports it. James mentions two different “laws” (i.e. the “royal law” and the “law of liberty”) and alludes to the Mosaic Law by citing two of the Ten Commandments contained therein. He specifically defines aspects of each of the three distinct “laws;” yet, he specifically indicates that the believer is subject to the “royal law” and the “law of liberty.” The allusion to the Mosaic Law is provided as an example that the Jew would readily recognize. The “law of liberty” or “law of freedom” is a phrase that seems to encapsulate the new freedom in Christ that believers had to live as led of the Holy Spirit versus a rule-bound devotion tradition and legalism.³

³ “James’s use of the term ‘law’ deserves special attention. He calls it ‘the perfect law of freedom’ (Gr.). The use of the word ‘law’ reveals his Jewish orientation and that of his readers. But James qualifies the word to make sure his readers do not misunderstand. He describes this law as ‘perfect’ and as characterized by ‘freedom.’ It is not merely the OT law, nor is it the Mosaic law perverted to become a legalistic system for earning salvation by good works. When James calls it the ‘perfect law,’ he has in mind the sum total of God’s revealed truth--not merely the preliminary portion found in the OT, but also the final revelation made through Christ and his apostles that was soon to be inscripturated in the NT. Thus it is complete, in contrast to that which is preliminary and preparatory. Furthermore, it is the ‘law of liberty’ (Gr.), by which James means that it does not enslave. It is not enforced by external compulsion. Instead, it is freely accepted and fulfilled with glad devotion under the enablement of the Spirit of God (Gal 5:22-23). For similar uses of the term ‘law’ in James, see 2:8, 12.” Quote from Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1989-1998), electronic version.

Second, James was one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church who presided over the Council in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. He would have been in agreement with Peter who urged that the requirements of the Mosaic Law, that “yoke of bondage,” not be placed upon the neck of the Gentiles who had become believers (see Acts 15:10). The point – there is Scriptural evidence to indicate that James was well-aware that the Mosaic Law was not a requirement for the new life of faith after the resurrection of Christ even though Jewish believers continued to practice certain Jewish-centric traditions associated with the Mosaic Law for a number of years after our Lord's resurrection and ascension.

Obviously, love for God and love for man are intertwined with the believer's Christian integrity and character – a fact well established in our study of the related components of the divine power sphere. James makes a connection between the believer's character as demonstrated in one's actions towards others and judgment for the believer. James understood the principle that even believers would be judged in eternity even though Paul had not yet provided elaboration on that concept (2 Cor 5:9-11 cf. Jn 5:24).

James teaches that mercy for the believer at the judgment (i.e. the judgment seat of Christ) will be dispensed based upon the mercy that the believer has demonstrated towards others according to the standard of the “royal law.” In this sense, there is similarity between the principles found in the kingdom law that Jesus taught (Matt 5:7 – “blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy”) and the “royal law” that James teaches. Why the similarity? I believe it is because the passageway for the believer of the Age of Israel and the passageway for the believer of the present Age of the Body of Christ into the Messianic Kingdom both contain a judgment by Christ. For the believer of the Age of Israel (including the Tribulation period), that judgment will be associated with the 2nd Advent of our Lord. For the believer of the Age of the Body of Christ, that judgment is the Bema Seat Judgment. After passing through each of their respective passageways, resurrected believers of both dispensations will share an inheritance in the kingdom. James indicated that the standard of the “royal law” (i.e. how much mercy has been dispensed in time by the believer towards others) will apply.

Being Swift to Hear – Demonstrated by the Combination of Faith and Good Works (2:14-26)

14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. 18 But someone may *well* say, “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. (Jas 2:14-26)

The mature believer endures with patience the testing of life (chapter 1) and practices the Truth (chapter 2) in daily life. Hearing the Word taught and talking about it with other believers is really no substitute for actions that demonstrate God's Word.

There are three interpretive angles or paradigms applied to this passage. Each reflects a prominent segment of Christianity.

- View #1 – the passage refers to a believer who once had saving faith, but has lost their faith and their salvation as a result – consistent with the **Arminian** view of the eternal security of the believer.
- View #2 – it refers to an unbeliever who professes to be a Christian, but who has never really expressed a saving faith – only intellectual assent – consistent with the **Reformed** position.
- View #3 – James is presenting an example of a believer who is not exercising their faith in daily life.

Therefore, the first two views are based upon the understanding that the person referenced is really an unbeliever and the third view acknowledges that from James' perspective, this is a believer. Let's examine this passage a little more closely.

Verse 14 – What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

Observations:

- The construction of this passage in Greek is such that James is demanding a negative response to his question – “faith without works cannot save a man.”
- In the Greek, the definite article precedes the word “faith,” i.e. “the faith;” however, the Greek definite article in this construction pattern is not generally included in the English.
- This same Greek construction pattern where the definite article precedes the word “faith” exists in James 1:2-4; 2:17, 18, 20, 22, 26 as well as 1 Corinthians 13:4.
- The translators of many Bible versions have inserted the qualifier “that” or “that kind of” or “such” in front of the word “faith” in verse 14 in an attempt to call attention to the word “faith.”
- Deliverance (i.e. salvation) at the judgment seat of Christ which seems to be the scenario being addressed in 2:13 is not connected to the thought pattern in verses 14 and following.

James does not suggest, or even hint, that there is some form of salvation available at the Judgment Seat. He speaks exclusively of receiving a merciful judgment or an unmerciful one...James does speak in his epistle of salvation of the life, not only at 1:21 but also in 5:19-20.⁴

Interpretation:

- James is indicating that some type of “works” are necessary for salvation (i.e. deliverance).
- The question is what “salvation” did James have in view?
- On the surface, this interpretation seems contrary to Paul's declaration that works are not a condition for salvation (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 11:6).
- Context is critical:
 - In 1:21-25, James encourages his believing audience of readers to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only so that they would be recipients of blessing from the Lord.
 - In 1:21, James is addressing those who are already believers and he indicates that the Word is able to save their psyche, their lives or their souls.
- Jesus also gave similar warnings that if His disciples did not continue to follow Him they could lose their “souls” (i.e., lives; cf. Matt. 16:24-26; Mark 3:4; 8:34-37; Luke 9:23-25). He used the same Greek word as James did to describe the life (i.e., *psyche*).
- The Greek word *psyche* is a reference to the total person (see 1 Pet 1:9).

⁴ Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James – Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving, Texas: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 61.

- The word “save” or “salvation” (i.e. *sodzo*) in Scripture most often is a reference to some type of temporal deliverance or healing in time since in context, it is most often related to the individual who is a believer.

It would be difficult to find a concept which is richer and more varied in meaning than the biblical concept of salvation. The breadth of salvation is so sweeping and its intended aim so magnificent that in many contexts the words used defy precise definition. Yet these difficulties have not thwarted numerous interpreters from assuming, often without any contextual justification, that the words used invariably mean 'deliverance from hell' or 'go to heaven when you die.' It may come as a surprise to many that this usage of 'salvation' (Gk. *soteria*) would have been the least likely meaning to come to the mind of a reader of the Bible in the first century. Indeed, in 812 usages of the various Hebrew words translated 'to save' or 'salvation' in the Old Testament, only 58 (7.1 percent) refer to eternal salvation.⁵

The verb *sozo* occurs 106 times and the noun *soteria* 46 times. The meaning “deliver from hell,” while rare in the Old Testament, is quite common in the New. Statistically, *sozo* is used 40 percent of the time in this way and *soteria* 35 percent. Like the Old Testament it sometimes means healing or recovery of health. When this happens, the notion of “deliver” disappears altogether, and the word simply means “to heal.”⁶

- James’ point - Orthodox faith without good works cannot protect the Christian from sin's deadly consequences in this life (i.e., a deadening of fellowship with God at least, and at most ultimately physical death; cf. 5:20; 1 John 5:16). That faith cannot save him from God's discipline of him as a believer. Good works in addition to faith are necessary for that kind of deliverance (salvation).⁷
- Another way of stating James’ point – daily trusting God or experiential faith (Phase 2) in the life of the believer does not exist if there is no outward manifestation of that faith in one's life, deeds, and love of the fellow believer.

Application –

- James teaches us that the true path to a soul that is delivered from the ravages of worldliness, lusts and sin is through a faith that is alive.
- We will only experience the joys of eternal life in time and have souls that overflow with rivers of life-giving benefit to others if we have a faith that is actively trusting the Lord and in motion for the benefit of others.
- Illustration: Contrast the life that could have been with the life that is now for Rev. Ted Haggard – the prominent pastor who was just this past week had his dark secrets of methamphetamine usage and gay sex disclosed to the world. His soul is going to be tormented night and day, his sleep will be affected, his marriage will most likely dissolve,

⁵ Robert N. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 2: The Doctrine of Repentance in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Vol 2 (Spring 1989): 14.

⁶ Joseph Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 114.

⁷ Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of James,” www.soniclight.com. This statement is bolstered by similar analysis that is presented in W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), electronic version and Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1985), electronic version.

his children will be scarred and his conscience has been seared. Had he trusted in the Lord to resolve whatever pains he was attempting to alleviate, he could have been "saved" or "delivered" from the ravages of sin.

Verses 15 & 16 – If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

To illustrate and emphasize the point that James has made in verse 14 (i.e. that faith or trusting God does not exist in the life of the believer unless there is some outward manifestation), James provides an example in these two verses. The example that James provides could have very well existed in the Jerusalem church since other passages document the presence of poor believers.

25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased *to do so*, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. (Rom 15:25-27)

3 And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:3)

The apostle John who wrote his epistles approximately 50 years or more later than James expresses the same thought.

17 But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 Jn 3:17-18)

A fairly prominent Greek scholar who was a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and who has been associated with the Grace Evangelical Society here in Dallas has transliterated James 2:14-17 as follows.

"What good does it do, my Christian brothers, if someone among you says he has faith and yet does not act on that faith? Faith certainly cannot preserve his life, can it? It would be the same thing as if one of you spoke to some Christian brother or sister who was destitute of the necessities of life and you said, 'Go home peacefully and get warmed and filled.' But if you did not give them the very things they needed for bodily life, what good would it do? Would their lives be saved by your confident words? In the same way when faith stands all by itself, because you fail to act on it, your inactive faith is as dead as your useless words to your destitute Christian brother. It has no life-preserving power at all!" (Jas 2:14-17, transliterated by Zane Hodges)⁸

Verse 17 – Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

James concludes his illustration with the point he is making. As stated previously, that point is that daily trusting God or experiential faith (Phase 2) in the life of the believer does not exist if there is no outward manifestation of that faith in one's life, deeds, and love of the fellow believer. James' equation of the word "faith" and "dead" is not meant to be in reference to soteriological and eschatological principles. Rather, as has been established, James is dealing

⁸ Zane C. Hodges, *Dead Faith: What is It?* (Dallas, Texas: Redencion Viva, 1987), 15

with Phase 2 experiential faith in the life of the believer. Our love of God is directly related to our trusting God (1:12-18) and the evidence that we believers are trusting God is in our deeds which includes our acts of love for fellow believers. James equates actions to love and to trust. No actions or deeds, no love for God and fellow believers, no trust of God.

Commentators often deal with the word dead very simplistically. As a metaphor, dead is often treated as though it could refer to nothing other than the death/life terminology employed to describe salvation from hell. But every linguist knows that “death” and “deadness” are concepts that have given rise to numerous and diverse metaphors in nearly every language.

So also, the Greek language (and the NT itself) abounds in such metaphors. Thus, in Romans alone, Paul can call Abraham’s body *dead* while it was still alive, and can attribute “deadness” to Sarah’s barren womb (Rom 4:19). He can say that *apart from the law sin was [or is] dead* (Rom 7:8; although sin can be quite active apart from the law: Rom 5:13), and then declare that *sin revived and I died* (Rom 7:9). So to the Christian’s body, in which the Spirit dwells, can be described as *dead* (Rom 8:10), although the Christian himself is regenerated. The complexity in Paul’s use of the term dead is clearly evident from these texts. A concordance study will yield examples in other parts of the NT as well (e.g., Luke 15:24, 32; Heb 6:1; 9:14; Rev 3:1). It is simply wrong to think that James’s (sic) metaphor about “dead faith” can have only one meaning, i.e., a soteriological one.⁹

Verses 18-19 – But someone may well say, “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

In these verses, James uses a literary device that was common with the Apostle Paul as well (see Rom 9:19-20; 1 Cor 15:35-26). It is called a diatribe – in this case the objection/reply format – a pattern of presenting a hypothetical objection followed by a response or rebuttal to the objection. The hypothetical objection is presented in verses 18-19. (The punctuation marks, i.e. quotations, are inserted in several translations, but are not a part of the Greek, thus creating an artificial impression that verse 18 is the statement of the hypothetical objector and verse 19 is part of James’ reply. It is my opinion based upon consultation with other sources that verses 18-19 constitute the hypothetical objection posed by a hypothetical objector or straw man that James is using).¹⁰

The hypothetical objection posed by the hypothetical objector appears to be a “reduction ad absurdum (reducing someone’s claims to absurdity).”¹¹ In other words, the objector might as well be saying that it is absurd to see a close connection between faith and works. The objector then uses an illustration of his own to demonstrate his point that it is impossible to show one’s faith through one’s works. The objector’s illustration in verse 19 – men and demons both believe the same truth (that there is one God), but their faith does not have the same result. All the demons do is tremble. However, in humans, faith (phase 2) may result in actions that demonstrate one’s faith.

No doubt James had heard a similar objection from his critics. His critics might say that faith and works are not really related to each other in the way you (James) say they are, so don’t

⁹ Hodges, *James*, 62-63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 64-65. Hodges states in unequivocal terms that “this writer [Hodges] regards it as certain that the objector’s words extend to the end of v 19.”

¹¹ *Ibid.*

criticize my faith just because I don't do something. In reality, James is being consistent with Jesus' teaching. James, like Jesus, acknowledged that some followers of Jesus would bear no fruit (Jn 15:2, 6).

Verses 20-26 – *But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*

James provides his rebuttal and explanation in these verses to the hypothetical question posed by the hypothetical objector in verses 18-19. James is unequivocal in his reply. He states his thesis in verse 20, then provides two examples or illustrations of the truth of his thesis. His thesis – Phase 2 faith of the believer is “useless” without works (v 20).

Elaboration – If believers are not trusting God for something each and every moment of the day and demonstrating that trust (faith) by their attitudes and actions (deeds) toward others, then their phase 2 faith is effectively useless. They are still a believer as a result of their phase 1 faith and their eternal destiny is secure; however, their claim to walk by faith is unsupportable before men.

Illustration #1 – Abraham – “Justified” by His Obedience or Works (vv. 22-23)

The illustration of Abraham is an excellent case in point in regard to the distinction between phase 1 justification and phase 2 justification. Abraham is first given credit for believing in the Lord (phase 1) as documented in Genesis 15:6. In that passage, Abram is said to have “believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” This “justification” of Abram is a judicial imputation of God's righteousness to the believer that has nothing to do with one's works – a point emphasized by Paul in Romans 4:1-5 where Paul clearly argues that faith, not works (e.g. circumcision) was the means by which Abram was justified since his circumcision (i.e. a work) occurred later as documented in Genesis 17:11.

Obviously, Paul is arguing for a type of “justification” before God that is related to one's eternal destiny as well as a faith on the part of the believer that is related thereto. This faith/justification scenario does not involve the works of man. If it did involve works, then the works (deeds) of man could be acceptable to God at the Great White Throne Judgment and Revelation 20:11-15 makes it very clear that the works of unbelievers are insufficient to satisfy the righteousness of God in regards to their eternal destiny. Therefore, I term the faith/justification/salvation scenario which Paul presents as phase 1 faith and salvation. James is obviously dealing with a different faith/justification/salvation scenario – one that involves believers and one that involves works.

If the faith and justification that is at issue in Paul's teaching and James' teach is the same, there is an obvious contradiction. It has been this dilemma that has been a challenge to theologians and believers throughout history. The man credited with starting the Reformation, Martin Luther, called the epistle of James an “epistle of straw” in the preface to his 1522 edition of the New Testament and he then placed the book in the appendix.¹² Even today, certain theologians and Bible teachers/scholars still struggle to reconcile the faith/works equation. Attempts to explain and reconcile the teaching of Paul and James are made with statements such

¹² Earl D. Radmacher, general editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 2107.

as – “we are saved by faith alone; but not by a faith that is alone.” To me, statements such as these fail on a major point of distinction – they approach the dichotomy between Paul and James’ teaching regarding faith and works as if the faith that is at issue in both cases is salvation (phase 1) faith. If anything should be clear in Scripture, once we express faith in Christ’s work for salvation, we are saved for an eternity. However, what is also very clear from Scripture is the fact that believers struggle and fight the fight of faith on a daily basis. These are clearly two distinct “faiths.” We can be winners in regard to our eternal destiny; however, the daily fight of faith can be another thing. Otherwise, why did Paul spend so much time in his letters exhorting and encouraging believers in this regard?

The manner in which we resolve this interpretive dilemma and the clarity with which we communicate our understanding is vital to eliminating confusion and/or creating or supporting interpretive models that are fraught with contradictions or inconsistencies. In regard to this particular issue, to the extent that there is lack of clarity, ambiguity or inconsistencies, then to that extent, our belief system will embrace legalistic inclinations. Statements such as “we are saved by faith alone; but not by a faith that is alone” just don’t cut it. They still leave the door slightly ajar for a back-loading of the Gospel with a paradigm that adheres to a view that “if you are really a believer, you will prove it through your works.” The assurance of one’s faith and salvation is then dependent upon a performance based measuring rod.

Taking a different tact than Paul, James indicates that Abraham was justified at a later point – when he offered his son Isaac on the altar of sacrifice. This act of trust (faith) by Abraham and Isaac is documented in Genesis 22 and occurred years after the declaration of Abram’s justification in Genesis 15. As developed in the earlier statements, this cannot be the same faith and justification in both instances. This is what I’ve termed phase 2 faith and is associated with a justification in which the believer appropriates experiential righteousness. This faith/justification/experiential righteousness scenario is that by which the believer becomes a friend of God and by which reward at the bema seat judgment of Christ is determined (2 Chron 20:7; Jn 15:14 cf. Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 3:15; 2 Cor 5:9-10).

In verse 23, James refers to Genesis 15:6 in reference to the validating effect of Abraham’s works in relation to his phase 1 faith. Certainly, when we live out our lives (phase 2) as believers in a manner that demonstrates that we are believers (phase 1), there is a validation of our phase 1 faith in the eyes of man. However, I do not believe that James is trying to teach that believers are not truly believers (phase 1 sense) if they do not produce deeds or actions to prove or validate it. This error seems to be the view that is either overtly promoted or unintentionally or even covertly supported through ambiguous statements made in an attempt to reconcile Paul and James.

Restatement of the thesis – In verse 24, James simply restates the thesis of his argument. To paraphrase, phase 2 faith without works is a useless faith. There is no benefit to anyone – the believer or to others. The believer will not appropriate the righteousness of God for this so-called “faith” is really no faith at all. It is “dead” or “useless” (Jas 2:20, 26).

Illustration #2 – the faith of Rahab, the prostitute (v. 25)

Admittedly, this is only a brief mention of Rahab and her action toward the spies (see Joshua 2) and there is no corresponding mention of Rahab’s faith by Paul. Apart from the precedent that James has already established through the use of an illustration (Abraham) that allowed us to compare his logic to Paul, the distinction between phase 1 and phase 2 faith would not be so clear if we were only provided the Rahab illustration. The information in Scripture regarding the salvation and life of Rahab is rather brief and somewhat cryptic. We do know that she is included in the list of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 (Heb 11:31). We also know that she was a part of the lineage of Jesus’ humanity (Matt 1:5). Nevertheless, in spite of the limited information we have about her, I apply the same interpretive precedent developed through an analysis of James’ prior illustration to this, his second illustration. I believe that the faith exercised

by Rahab when she hid the spies was a phase 2 faith demonstrated by works. She had enough information about the God of Israel prior to this event in Joshua 2 to have accepted Yahweh as the God not only of Israel, but of the Gentiles as well. She was very familiar with Yahweh's work on Israel's behalf earlier in their history when they were delivered from the hand of the Egyptians and she used Yahweh's name in a personal way when interacting with the spies (Josh 2:9). This personal reference did not just spring up in the instant the spies arrived and she knew her life was in danger. She later sealed her deliverance by complying with the instructions of the spies to hang a scarlet colored rope from her window so that her household would be spared – another act of phase 2 faith demonstrated by works.

Restatement of the thesis (v. 26) – In verse 26, James concludes with a final restatement of his thesis in unambiguous terms – phase 2 faith without works is as good as dead just like the body without the spirit is dead.