

Bible Studies for Life: September 18

Faith on Display in Your Actions • James 2:14-26

By Laura Lee Leathers



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In the book of James, the word faith is mentioned 16 times. Eleven of those references are used in our lesson text. What is faith? The acrostic, **Forsaking All I Trust Him**, still gives the best definition. It's turning from your sin, your self-will, and placing your faith in who Christ is— the propitiation for our sin.

Faith in Christ is evidenced through good works, a testimony to the world that Christ is living within us. The test for today is to evaluate yourself. Either you are a Believer, or you aren't. There is no middle ground (2 Cor. 13:5). There is an eternal danger of having a false faith (vv. 17, 20, 26).

Also, it is essential to note that some interpreters see a conflict between James and Paul with respect to works and salvation (2:17-26). However, they are saying the same thing, only from different perspectives. James says that the kind of faith that saves also produces good works. Paul says we are saved by grace through faith "unto good works" (Hershel Hobbs).

A faith not backed up by our actions is a useless faith (James 2:14-17 ESV). In four verses, James asks three questions about how our faith is demonstrated. Then, to help the reader better answer the questions, He gives the illustration of a brother or sister who is poorly clothed and lacking daily food. Do you slap the person on the back and tell them all is good, “be warmed and filled?”

How does this improve their situation? It doesn't! Genuine faith produces steps of action to meet the need. “Professions of faith unaccompanied by the life that God produces in our lives is absolutely useless.” Test question: ‘Is my profession of faith real?’” (Alistair Begg, Sermon: A Study in James, Vol. 2).

Faith is more than merely what you believe (James 2:18-20). Notice the references to “someone” and “you foolish person.” Verses 18 and 19 are challenging verses, and some commentators cite James as referencing a hypothetical individual to do his thesis.

Warren Wiersbe gives the following synopsis: “Even the demons believe – and shudder! When you trust Christ, you are ‘created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them’” (Eph. 2:10).

Being a Christian involves trusting Christ and living for Christ. You receive the life, then you reveal the life. Faith that is barren is not saving faith. The Greek word translated “dead” in James 2:20 carries the meaning of barren or idle, like money drawing no interest.

“James has introduced us to two kinds of faith that can never save the sinner: dead faith (the intellect alone) and demonic faith (the intellect and the emotions). He closes this section by describing the only kind of faith that saves the sinner: dynamic faith” (Be Mature, Growing up in Christ).

Genuine faith is seen in our obedience to God (James 2:21-26).

James next brings forth two witnesses from the Old Testament who will prove his point. The first is Abraham (Genesis chapters 15 and 22), a man who was willing to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice. The second was Rahab (Joshua chapters two and six), the woman who hid the spies

Both are found in the Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19; 30-31). Their lives are complete opposites: a godly man versus a sinful woman; a friend of God versus an enemy of God. Yet both exhibited dynamic faith.

Wiersbe reminds us that “dynamic saving faith is based on the Word of God... The men and women of faith named in Hebrews 11 were people of action: God spoke, and they obeyed. Again, faith is not believing in spite of evidence; faith is obeying in spite of consequence... faith changes a life and goes to work for God.”

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified” (2 Corinthians 13:5, 6 NKJV).

This is what James is stressing in these verses. Do you possess true faith or false faith?

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