

What is Living Faith?

*“What does it profit, my brethern, though a man says he has faith, and has not works?
Can faith save him?” James 2:14*

James, the brother of Jesus, had a lot to say about living faith. He very bluntly tells us that faith alone cannot save us. But wait one minute, the entire New Testament teaches that we are saved by grace through faith and not by “works” (see *Ephesians 2:8*). The people who tried to get right with God by working to keep religious laws and being good, instead of depending on faith, always stumbled and fell (see *Romans 9:32 and Galatians 2:16*).

Can Paul (the writer of thirteen books of the Bible) , who says “we are saved by faith,” and James (the brother of Jesus), who says “faith alone is not enough, you must have works,” both be right? Yes, they are both right! How can this be? They are both right because they are talking about different things, and here is the difference: Paul was addressing the problem of people saying, “I have to keep all Jewish Laws and regulations to be saved.” James was addressing those who said, “It doesn’t matter what you do, as long as you believe in Jesus.” They were fighting two different enemies! Both used the same word “works” but in different ways. Paul told the new Christians that they didn’t have to be circumcised **to be saved**. James told new Christians that **once they were saved**, they had to live godly to demonstrate their faith. Paul focused on the **root** of salvation (what happens inside of me). James focused on the **fruit** of salvation (what happens outside of me).

Jesus agreed with Paul when he said, “I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life,” and with James when He said “wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (*John 6:47 & Matthew 7:20*). Indeed Paul told us how to **know** you are saved and James told us how to **show** you are saved. Finally, when Paul refers to faith alone, he is instructing us how to **become** a child of God, and when James refers to faith he is instructing us how to **behave** like a child of God.

If any of this is confusing to you, Paul gives a good explanation in Ephesians chapter two: “⁸*For it is **by grace** you have been saved, **through faith**--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (*Ephes. 2:8-10*). The order of the words in bold print is very important, if you get the order wrong, then you are in error. The correct order is: By grace, through faith, to do good works. Salvation is the work of God alone, it is not of man. Paul writes “...*And this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*”*

In the book of James, chapter two, we are given five vital points of information to know if our faith is alive and real.

The first point we discover is this: **Living faith is not something you just talk about!** What good is it, James says, if a man claims to have faith and has no evidence or works in his life to support his claim (*James 2:14*). You can't just talk about having faith, and expect God to honor your words; that is dead faith.

The second point is this: **Living Faith is not just something you feel!** Many people confuse emotions with faith. You can be emotionally moved and never act on it. Likewise the Word of God can emotionally move you but you never allow the Word to make a difference in your life. James said that if you see a brother or sister naked and destitute of daily food, and you say to him or her, "I wish you well, be warmed and full of food," and you give them nothing -- what good does that do (*James 2:15*). So you can clearly see that faith without action is dead. Faith that does not show itself by deeds is no faith at all. Godly talk, without Godly acts, equals dead faith. What good is it if you see someone in need and say to that person, "Depart in peace, and be warmed and full of food." The same principles apply in your life. If you are in need of a job, you cannot sit at home and tell God, "Oh please let them call me." You should at least fill out a job application or submit a resume, so the prospective employer will have a telephone number to call. Holy talk without actions equals no faith.

The third point is this: **Living Faith is not just something you think about!** "I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, 'Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I'll handle the works department.' Not so fast. You can no more **show me** your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove (*James 2:18*). The key words are "show me" -- real faith is visible! You can see real faith. If you claim to be a Christian, people will be able to see it. Someone said, "Faith is like calories, you can't see them but you can surely see the results." You can't see faith but you can see the results. If you say, "I believe personal health is very important," then I will ask you if you eat right? Do you exercise regularly? Do you get proper rest? Do you get regular medical checkups? If you answered no to any of these questions, your action tells me that personal health is not very important to you. You may think it is, but actions always speak louder than words. It doesn't matter what you say, Living Faith is more than something you think or say. The Bible is saying, **show me, show me, show me, by the way you live!**

Let me ask you this question. "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Would there be evidence that you witnessed to others about Jesus? Have you been seen entering or leaving Jesus' meetings weekly? Are you supporting Jesus' causes? If someone was listening in on your telephone conversations, would they hear you

telling a friend or coworker how you love Jesus? Are you leaving a money trail of tithes and offering to follow? Have you been seen doing good deeds for the poor and needy? This is exactly what James is speaking of. Real Faith produces visual changes in your life.

The fourth point is this: **Living Faith is not just something you believe!** You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the devil believes that--and shudders (*James 2:19*). Many people have very strong beliefs in God, Jesus, and the Bible. Many people believe in God and can quote scripture very well. So what? So can the devil. Proverbs tells us that “the fool has said in his heart that there is no God.” This tells me that the devil is no fool, because he believes in God and knows the Bible much better than most men.

Living for Jesus is not just head knowledge. Many people will miss the wedding supper of the Lamb by five minutes because they have God in their heads and not in their hearts. Real faith is more than just saying, “I believe.”

The fifth point is this: **Living Faith is something you do!** Faith is active, not passive! It is a commitment. James gives us two examples of active living faith: Abraham and Rahab. They were two very different people. Abraham was a man, a Hebrew, a patriarch, and a major Bible figure. Rahab was a woman, a Gentile, a prostitute, and a minor Bible figure. When it comes to serving God it doesn't matter who you are, the one thing everyone must possess to be a child of God is Living Faith. Abraham and Rahab had faith that led them to take action, to do something! Their works proved their faith. Let me repeat just so this point is not lost; Abraham had already been declared righteous some twenty-five years before he was asked to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah. What he was asked to do on Mount Moriah was to demonstrate that God was first in his life, and not even his cherished son Isaac was dearer to him than God. Our faith is not **determined** by what we do, it is **demonstrated** by what we do. Our behavior shows what we really believe and that we put God first in our lives!

It is time to check out your faith, to see whether you have Living Faith.

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?” (NIV 2 Cor. 13:5)

May the peace of God rest upon you!

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