

James, Dead Faith, Salvation, and Justification: James 2:14-26¹

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| {14} What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? | {20} But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? |
| {15} If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, | {21} Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? |
| {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? | {22} Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? |
| {17} Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. | {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. |
| {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. | {24} You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. |
| {19} You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!" | {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. |

Four Views on James 2:14-26

- I. View #1 - Catholic et al.: Eternal life is by faith plus works. Dead faith cannot produce works and thus cannot lead to eternal life.
- II. View #2 - Arminianism: Eternal life is lost by lack of works or by grievous sin. Dead faith cannot produce works and thus will lead to loss of eternal life.
- III. View #3 - Calvinism (Lordship Salvation): True, or genuine, or real faith necessarily leads to works. Dead faith cannot produce works and thus will not lead to eternal life.
- IV. View #4 - Free Grace: A Christian's faith will die without works. It is works that makes a faith alive, not a living (or genuine) faith that makes works. Thus, a Christian can have dead faith. There are two senses of justification: one by faith alone and one by works. Though one can be justified in one sense (imputed righteousness) and have eternal life, it is possible that he lacks justification in a different sense (not having good works). If this is the case, the Christian will suffer loss of reward.

Analysis of the Four Views

¹ There are two textual variants in the passage. In v. 18 in the phrase "Show me your faith without your works" (*deikson moi tēn pistin sou chōris tōn ergōn sou* (δείξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων σου)), UBS has *chōris* (χωρὶς, without) though it does not list this as a variant. The Majority Text has *ek* (ἐκ, from, out of, by) which is consistent with the use of ἐκ later in the same verse.

In v. 20 in the phrase "faith without works is dead" (*hē pistis chōris tōs ergōn argā estin* (ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶς ἔργων ἀργή ἐστίν)), UBS has *argā* (ἀργή, useless) with the rating of "B" while the Majority Text has *nekra* (νεκρά, dead, useless) instead of ἀργή. For its "B" rating UBS lists B [Codex Vaticanus, 4th century] and C* [Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus corrector, 5th century]. For its majority rating, the Majority Text lists Ⲙ [Codex Sinaiticus, 4th century] and A [Codex Alexandrinus, 5th century].

- I. View #1 - Catholicism, et al.: Eternal life is by faith plus works. Dead faith cannot produce works and thus cannot lead to eternal life.

A. Unpacking View #1

1. True or genuine faith must be followed by good works or the believer forfeits eternal life.
2. A dead faith or a faith that has died will not produce works.
3. faith + works = eternal life.
4. This view is held by Roman Catholicism.

"Our Lord tied the forgiveness of sins to faith and Baptism ... Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ ..." ¹

"Baptism cannot be her only means of using the keys of the Kingdom of heaven ... The Church must be able to forgive all penitents their offenses ... It is through the sacrament of Penance that the baptized can be reconciled with God and with the Church." ²

"And this sacrament of Penance is, for those who have fallen after baptism, necessary unto salvation; as baptism itself is for those who have not as yet been regenerated." ³

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT CANON IX.-If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT CANON XII.-If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.

- a. Note that in the theological debate between Protestants and Catholics, both affirm that salvation (eternal life) is by *grace* alone.

¹United States Catholic Conference, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994, pp. 255.

²*Catechism*, p. 255.

³Council of Trent, XIV, 2.

- b. What Roman Catholicism denies is that salvation (eternal life) is by *faith* alone.
 - c. Thus, there is a difference in the debate between grace alone and faith alone.
5. This view is also held by Mormonism.

"And whosoever doeth this and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth ... shall have eternal life..."⁴

"The Individual Effect of the Atonement makes it possible for any and every soul to obtain absolution from the effect of personal sins, through the mediation of Christ; but such saving intercession is to be invoked by individual effort as manifested through faith, repentance, and continued works of righteousness."⁵

"One of the most fallacious doctrines originated by Satan and propounded by man is that man is saved alone by the grace of God; that belief in Jesus Christ alone is all that is needed for salvation. ... [This passage] makes clear the two facets, neither of which alone would bring the individual salvation—the grace of Christ, particularly as represented by his atoning sacrifice, and individual effort."⁶

6. This view is also held by Jehovah's Witnesses

"Some suggest that belief in Jesus is the end of the matter. ... However, to concentrate on only one essential requirement for salvation to the exclusion of the others is like reading one crucial clause in a contract and ignoring the rest. ... Yes believing in Jesus is crucial to our salvation, but more is needed. ... We must take in accurate knowledge of God's purposes and his way of salvation. Then we must exercise faith in the Chief Agent of salvation, Jesus Christ, and do God's will the rest of our lives. ... Salvation is sure for those who follow this course."⁷

7. My argument here is not that, because this view is also held by certain cults, therefore the view is false.
- a. Just because a cult holds a certain view, this is not enough to show that it is false.
 - b. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses maintain that there is only one true God.

⁴ *Book of Mormon*, Alma 7:16

⁵ James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith: Being a Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1971), 89.

⁶ Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), pp. 206, 207.

⁷ n.a., "What Must We Do To Be Saved?" *The Watch Tower: Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom* 110, no. 18 (September 15, 1989): pp. 6, 7.

- c. Christians as well maintain that there is only one true God.
- d. To be sure, the god of Jehovah's Witnesses is not the God of Christianity.

B. Critiquing View #1

1. James and Paul seem to some to be in contradiction.

- a. Paul unambiguously denies that works are a condition for salvation. (Rom. 4:4-6)

Rom. 4:4-6 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. {5} But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, {6} just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

- b. James and Paul are in fundamental harmony that eternal life is a gift of God graciously and sovereignly bestowed.

James 1:17-18 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. {18} Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

- c. However, James also plainly makes works a condition for attaining salvation.

James 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

- (1) The grammar of the question "Can faith save him?" is such that a negative answer is expected; like saying "You're not wearing that shirt, are you?"
 - (a) It is the use of the Greek negative word μή (mē) in a question.⁸
 - (b) It is contrasted with the grammar of a question that employs the Greek word ού (ou) which expects an affirmative answer (like saying in English, "This is yours, is it not?")
- (2) An idiomatic way of stating the question would be "Faith cannot save him, can it?" with the expected answer "No, faith cannot save him who has no works."
- (3) Thus, it would seem that James and Paul are contradicting each other.

⁸ "In questions μή (or μήτι) implies that the expected answer is 'no.'" [H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual of Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1955), 265]

2. The Bible does not contradict itself.
3. Therefore, either James and Paul are not talking about the same salvation or James and Paul are not talking about the same works (or both).
 - a. There is no reason to think that the idea of works is different between James and Paul.
 - b. Therefore, James and Paul are talking about a different salvation.
 - c. The term 'saved' is not always used with reference to eternal life.

(1) The term 'saved' is clearly referring to eternal life in Acts 16:31

Acts 16:31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."

- d. However, in Acts 27:31, the term 'saved' is clearly not referring to eternal life.

Acts 27:31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."

- e. James' warning in 5:19-20 should be taken as a warning against physical judgment that can be brought on by sin.

James 5:19-20 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

4. It is easier (and more consistent with the text here in James) to maintain that James is not teaching that works are a condition for eternal life than it is to maintain that Paul is teaching that works *are* a condition for eternal life.
5. Therefore, the salvation that James is talking about (of which works is a condition) is not eternal life.⁹

II. View #2 - Arminianism: Eternal life is lost by lack of works or by grievous sin. Dead faith cannot produce works and thus will lead to loss of eternal life.

A. Unpacking View #2

⁹ This brief response obviously does not fully settle the broad theological question about whether works are necessary for eternal life. Here I am only interested in showing that the way James is sometimes employed to say that works are necessary for eternal life is wrong.

1. James is not denying that faith is necessary for eternal life. However, if a Christian fails to exemplify works or falls into grievous sin, he will lose his eternal life.
2. This view says that faith = eternal life; but either no works or + sin = loss of eternal life
3. This view is held within the Wesleyan tradition (Methodism; Arminianism)

"The 'ifs' of the New Testament are sufficient to establish the fact that eternal justification is conditional upon continued obedience and perseverance in the faith."¹⁰

4. This view is also held by Roman Catholicism.

"Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell ..."¹¹

B. Critiquing View #2

1. Nowhere does James indicate any concern that his readers would lose their eternal life.
2. There is no reason to take James' comments in 5:19-20 as a warning of losing one's eternal life.

James 5:19-20 Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

- a. The expression "save a soul from death" is sometimes mistakenly taken to mean "to be delivered from eternal hell."
- b. This meaning is least likely to a Greek reader of the same text.
- c. The expression means "to save the life."
- d. Verses which corroborate this rendering are Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9; Rom. 8:13

Mark 3:4 Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.

¹⁰Paul Russell Matlock, *The Four Justifications* (Salem: Schmul Publishers, 1980), p. 85. Matlock's work is his master's thesis on the Methodist divine John William Fletcher (a.k.a., de la Fleceere, 1729-1785) who was a contemporary of and often preached with John Wesley.

¹¹*Catechism*, p. 456.

Luke 6:9 Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?"

Rom. 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

- (1) The expression is never found in the New Testament text which describes the conversion experience.
- (2) There are instances in the Bible where God physically destroyed people because of their sin.

Lev. 10:2 So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

Num. 11:1 Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.

Num. 16:35 And a fire came out from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

1 Cor. 11:30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

- (3) Therefore, the meaning is that sin in the life of the Christian can lead to physical death.¹²

III. View #3 - Calvinism (Lordship Salvation): True, or genuine, or real faith necessarily leads to works. Dead faith cannot produce works and thus cannot lead to eternal life.

A. Unpacking View #3

1. Dead faith is the same thing as a false faith.

"James 2:14-26 says faith without works is *dead* and cannot save. James describes *spurious* faith as pure hypocrisy, mere cognitive assent, devoid of any verifying works ..."¹³

¹² Again, this brief response does not settle the broader theological question of whether a Christian can lose his salvation. Here I am only dealing with whether this particular passage in James necessarily says that he can, to which my response is 'no.'

¹³ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says "Follow Me"?* Revised and Expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 186, emphasis added. In the older edition, the quote is on p. 170. John F. MacArthur, Jr. *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When*

"In 2:18 James ... speaks of the demonstration or manifestation of faith by works. the believer shows *true* faith at the human level by visible actions."¹⁴

2. False (dead) faith cannot lead to eternal life.
3. This view says that faith = eternal life + works.
4. If a professing Christian does not manifest good works, then he has a dead faith.
5. This means that he was never a true believer to begin with.
6. This view is held within the Reformed (Calvinist) tradition (Presbyterianism and others).

"The Bible teaches clearly that the evidence of God's work in a life is the *inevitable* fruit of transformed behavior (1 John 3:10)."¹⁵

"Faith that does not result in righteous living is dead and cannot save (James 2:14-17). Professing Christians utterly lacking the fruit of true righteousness will find no biblical basis for assurance of salvation."¹⁶

"James declares that we are saved by faith, *which shows itself in works*. ... James could not be more explicit. He is confronting the concept of a passive, false 'faith,' which is devoid of the fruits of salvation. He is not arguing for works in addition to or apart from faith. He is showing why and how true, living faith always works."¹⁷

"Only when God is loved supremely and the spirit of the law kept has a man any reason to believe that he has been truly born of God."¹⁸

7. This is probably the most widely held interpretation on this passage among evangelicals who say that eternal life cannot be lost.

He Says 'Follow Me'? (Grand Rapids: Academie, Zondervan, 1988). Where a citation occurs in both editions, the pages numbers to the older edition are included in square brackets.

¹⁴ R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 165, emphasis added.

¹⁵ MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 29 [23], emphasis added.

¹⁶ MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus*, p. 29 [23].

¹⁷ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993), p. 154, emphasis in original.

¹⁸ Walter Chantry, *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), p. 74.

8. There is an oft touted expression to summarize this view, viz., "Faith alone saves, but not the faith that is alone."

B. Critiquing View #3

1. The actual terms are dead faith vs. living faith (implied), *not* genuine faith vs. false faith.
2. In James 2:26, James utilizes a simile, saying that a dead faith is analogous to a dead body.

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

a. Dead body or genuine body?

- (1) No one who encounters a dead body would conclude that the body is not a genuine body.
- (2) Many interpreters in discussing this passage erroneously use the categories of real (or genuine) vs. false instead of dead vs. living (implied).

"James 2:14-26 says faith without works is *dead* and cannot save. James describes *spurious* faith as pure hypocrisy, mere cognitive assent, devoid of any verifying works ..."¹⁹

"In 2:18 James ... speaks of the demonstration or manifestation of faith by works. the believer shows *true* faith at the human level by visible actions."²⁰

- (3) However, to do so without an argument to this end is unwarranted and unnecessarily confuses the passage and makes the discussion tendentious.
- ##### b. No one who encounters a dead body would ever conclude that the body was never alive. Rather, the presence of a dead body is the clearest proof of a *loss* of life.
- (1) Some counter that the term 'dead' might refer to something that was never alive.

¹⁹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says "Follow Me"?* Revised and Expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 186, emphasis added. In the older edition, the quote is on p. 170. John F. MacArthur, Jr. *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says 'Follow Me'?* (Grand Rapids: Academie, Zondervan, 1988). Where a citation occurs in both editions, the pages numbers to the older edition are included in square brackets.

²⁰ R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 165, emphasis added.

- (a) Eph. 2:1 refers to the readers who were dead.

Eph. 2:1 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

- (b) Surely this does not mean that the readers were once alive.

(2) Two responses to this counter argument.

- (a) First, one might argue that indeed the readers were once alive in Adam before the fall. Thus, their death was a death in Adam as their Federal head.

- (b) Second, one might argue that the proper comparison between the Ephesians passage and the James passage is not merely the term 'dead.'

- (i) In the Ephesians passages, it is the readers themselves who were literally spiritually dead.

- (ii) In the James passage, a simile is being used, viz., the simile of a dead physical body.

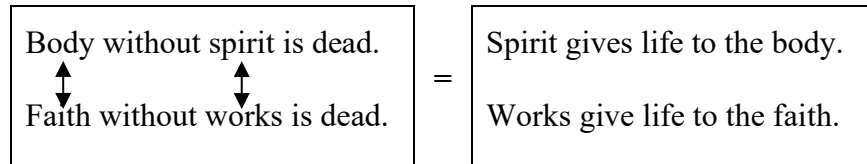
- (iii) Thus, the comparison is illicit since one is a literal spiritual death of the readers and the other is a simile of a dead physical body.

- (iv) Further, since the imagery in James is of a dead physical body, then it is more fitting to argue that the dead physical body presupposes that it once was alive, even if one had to admit that the dead readers in the Ephesians passage did not indicate that they were once alive.

3. Therefore, the simile of the dead body shows that the presence of a dead faith indicates that this faith is genuine indeed and that this faith was once alive but is now dead.
4. Since one cannot lose one's salvation, then the faith which has died does not indicate a loss of eternal life.
5. Additionally, the true and alive faith is sufficient for eternal life.
6. Therefore, if one has a faith that has died, it is not the case that one was never saved in the first place.
7. Additional thoughts on the parallel
 - a. Notice that the causal arrow in the simile of the relationship of the spirit and the body is exactly the opposite of the causal relationship between faith and works that some interpreters of James maintain.

- (1) In the simile, the body is given life by the spirit.

- (2) James likens faith to the body and works to the spirit.
- (3) Therefore, faith is given life by works (rather than the other way around).



- (4) In other words, it is works that make a faith alive rather than a living faith that causes works.
- b. This poses several problems for some interpreters.
- (1) Some erroneously encourage their hearers to examine their faith to make sure it is alive so that it will produce works.
- (a) But this is like saying that one should make sure the body is alive so that it will have a spirit.
- (b) But it would make more sense to say that make sure the body has a spirit so that it will be alive, since it is not being alive that causes it to have a spirit, but rather it is having a spirit that causes it to be alive.
- (c) Thus, the encouragement should be that one should make sure they have works in order to not have a dead faith.
- (2) The proper arrangement of the elements of the simile makes the simile incompatible with their view.
- (a) Suppose (in accordance with this view) that works indicates that one has the faith that produces eternal life.
- (b) But the simile says that it is the works that make a faith alive.
- (c) Therefore, this would put them in the awkward position of having to say that one should produce works in order to have eternal life.
- (d) However, this contradicts the very position of these interpreters who deny that works are necessary for eternal life.
- c. Therefore, the simile proves something that contradicts a fundamental position of this view.
- d. Therefore, the "true, or genuine, or real faith necessarily leads to works" view is false.

IV. Defending View #4 - Free Grace: A Christian's faith will die without works. It is works that makes a faith alive, not a living (or genuine) faith that makes works. Thus, a Christian can have dead faith. There are two senses of justification: one by faith alone and one by works. Though one can be justified in one sense (imputed righteousness) and have eternal life, it is possible that he lacks justification in a different sense (not having good works). If this is the case, the Christian will suffer loss of reward.

A. The meaning of James on 'dead faith'.

1. A dead faith is no less "real" than a living faith.
 - a. The contrast that James employs is dead vs. living (implied) not real or genuine vs. false.
 - b. The early discussion in James 1:26-27 has to do with religion (θρησκός, thrēskos) *not* faith.

James 1:26-27 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. {27} Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

- (1) In that passage, the lack of works shows that one's *religion* is useless (μάταιος, mataios).
- (2) While it is true that νεκρός (nekros, dead) can mean 'useless'²¹ it does not necessarily follow from this that it is useless to produce eternal life.
 - (a) In 1:26-27 the idea of useless (μάταιος, mataios) seems to be that a religion is useless if it cannot control the tongue or keep one unspotted from the world.

James 1:26-27 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. {27} Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

- (b) In 2:14-17 the idea of dead (νεκρά, nekra) seems to be that a faith is dead (useless?) if it does not lead a Christian to give a needy Christian "the things that are needed for the body."

²¹ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v., "νεκρός", p. 534-535.

James 2:14-17 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, {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? {17} Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

(c) This is further evident by James' use of the term 'profit' (ὄφελος, ophelos).

(3) In neither passage is James saying that a dead faith is useless in that it cannot produce eternal life.

2. If a Christian does not have works, this shows that his faith is dead.
3. However, this does not mean that his faith is absent or false.
4. Further, this does not mean that he was not saved in the first place.

B. The meaning of James on 'salvation'.

1. James is writing to Christians. (brethren)

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

James 2:1 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

James 3:10 Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

James 3:12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

2. James believes that eternal life is a gift from God.

- a. James 1:17-18 says that every good gift is from above.

James, Dead Faith, Salvation, and Justification: James 2:14-26

James 1:17-18 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. {18} Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

- b. The Greek word ἄνωθεν (anōthen) means both "again" and "from above."²²

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

- c. James strongly emphasizes the sovereign volition of God in our rebirth.

James 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

3. James affirms that faith cannot save him who has no works.

James 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

- a. Some argue that the distinction here is between a faith that results in eternal life and a faith that does not result in eternal life.

- (1) The faith that has works results in eternal life and the faith that does not have works does not result in eternal life.

- (a) According to the Greek grammar the required answer to the rhetorical question is 'no'.

- (b) Thus, James is arguing that the faith that does not have works cannot result in eternal life.

- (2) They support their position by the insertion of the pronoun 'that' or 'such.'
(Thus, some translations say "... can *that* faith [i.e., the faith which has no works] save him?"²³)

- (a) The insertion of the pronoun 'that' is not warranted by the Greek.

- (b) James uses *pistis* (πίστις, faith) several times where such translator add no qualification as in 2:17, 20, 22 (twice), and 26.

²² Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v., "ἄνωθεν," p. 77.

²³ Translations that include the word 'that' or an equivalent qualifier include: the American Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, the English Majority Text Version ("that kind"), the English Standard Version, the Evangelical Heritage Bible ("such"), the Geneva Bible, the Mounce Reverse Interlinear New Testament ("that kind"), the NET Bible ("this kind"), the New International Version ("such kind"), and the Revised Version.

- b. Thus, James is clearly saying that faith alone cannot save instead of merely saying that only a certain type of faith (i.e., a dead faith) cannot save.
- 4. Since James does not contradict Paul, then the term 'save' cannot be referring to eternal life.
 - a. In verse 1:21-22, James affirms that only if his readers do God's word will it be able to "save their souls."

James 1:21-22 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. {22} But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

- b. As argued above, expressions which talk about saving the soul are sometimes mistakenly taken to mean "to be delivered from eternal hell."
- c. Therefore, the meaning (in agreement with James 1:15 and 5:20) is that sin in the life of the Christian can lead to physical death.

James 1:15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

C. The meaning of James on justification

- 1. James affirms that faith alone justifies (in agreement with Paul).
- 2. James also affirms that there is a justification by works.
 - a. In verse 2:24 the word 'only' does not modify the word 'faith' but rather the implied repeated verb 'justified'.

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.
ὁρᾶτε τοίνυν ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον.

- (1) The word μόνον (monon, only) cannot be an adjective modifying 'faith' since they do not agree in gender.
- (2) The word μόνον is an adverb and thus is modifying the verb 'justified.'

(3) Thus, the verse would read "You see then, that a man is justified by works, and not only [justified] by faith."²⁴

b. Paul agrees with this in Rom. 4:2.

Rom. 4:2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

3. James never suggests any such thing as a *single* justification by faith plus works.

4. Therefore, the justification by works must be another justification than the justification by faith alone.

a. Thus, there are two justifications in the New Testament.

b. That there are two justifications in the New Testament is evident by comparing the event in the life of Abraham by which he was justified that Paul uses with the event in the life of Abraham by which he was justified that James uses.

(1) In Rom. 4:2-3 Paul says that Abraham was justified when he believed God. This event happened in Gen. 15:6.

Rom. 4:2-3 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS ACCOUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Gen. 15:6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

(2) In James 2:21 James says that Abraham was justified when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar. The event happened in Gen. 22:9 which was many years later.

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

²⁴ I am indebted to Zane C. Hodges for this insight. "The key to this understanding is the Greek adverb 'only' (*monon*), which does not qualify (i.e., modify) the word *faith*, since the form would then have been *monēs*. AS an adverb, however, it modifies the verb *justified* implied in the second clause. James is saying that a by-faith justification is not the *only* kind of justification there is. There is also a by-works justification. The former type is *before God*; the latter type is *before men*. (Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 71, emphasis in original.)

Gen. 22:9 Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

- c. If Paul says Abraham was justified when he believed and James says he was justified when he offered up Isaac, then there must be two different justifications in the life of Abraham.
- 5. When one is justified by faith, he finds an unqualified acceptance before God (Rom. 4:6), but only God can see this spiritual transaction.
 - (1) This justification leads to eternal life.
 - (2) This justification delivers one from spiritual (eternal) death.
 - (3) This justification cannot be lost.
- 6. When one is justified by works, he finds a vindication before men that his faith is living.
 - a. This justification can come only to one who already has eternal life.
 - b. This justification can deliver one from physical death.
 - c. This justification can be lost.

V. Conclusion

- A. James does not contradict Paul's doctrine of free grace through faith as the single condition for eternal life.
- B. Neither does James offer support to the notion that a "dead faith" cannot exist in the life of a Christian, but rather, James warns Christians of the dangers of a dead faith.
- C. The dangers of a dead faith do not include hell, since the warnings are directed toward Christians.
- D. It is nevertheless true that sin remains a deadly nemesis to the Christian experience which can end our physical lives. (cf. 1 Cor. 11:27-30)

1 Cor. 11:27-30 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. {28} But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. {29} For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. {30} For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

VI. Postscript: James and the hypothetical objector (vv. 18-23)

James, Dead Faith, Salvation, and Justification: James 2:14-26

Page 17

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James 2:18-23 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. {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? {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? {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.

- A. The use of the literary device of introducing a hypothetical objection or hypothetical speaker is also used by Paul.
 1. Rom. 6:1 "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"
 2. Rom. 9:19 "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'"
 3. Rom. 11:19 "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.'"
 4. 1 Cor. 15:35 "But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?'"
- B. It is incumbent upon the reader to ascertain where the objector's words begin and end and where James's response to the objector begins and ends.
- C. Common View
 1. By the use of quotation marks, some translations indicate that James' hypothetical objector counters James' argument by saying "You have faith, and I have works."
 2. Additionally, some translations indicate that James responds to the objector beginning in verse 18 with the phrase "Show me your faith without your works . . ." ²⁵
 3. Thus, the argument according to these interpreters would be:

²⁵ Translations that use quotation marks to indicate James's hypothetical objector's words to be "You have faith, and I have works." include the American Standard Version, the Contemporary English Version, the English Majority Text Version, the English Standard Version, the Evangelical Heritage Version, the Holman Christian Standard Bible, the New King James Version, Mounce's Reverse Interlinear New Testament, the New American Bible, the New American Standard Bible (Revised Edition), the New English Translation, the New International Version, the Revised Standard Version, and the Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. The New American Standard Bible indicates James's hypothetical objector's words to be ""You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

JAMES: Faith without works is dead and cannot save. If your faith is unaccompanied by works, then it isn't real faith. (2:14-17)

OBJECTOR You have faith, I have works. Some people's religion may be
: characterized by a tremendous faith even if it doesn't have outward good works, while other people's religion may be characterized by outward good works. But both are legitimate religious experiences. Therefore, works doesn't necessarily have anything to do with faith. Just because someone doesn't have outward good works doesn't mean that his faith is dead. (2:18a)

JAMES: If you can, try to show me without using your works that you have faith. (You can't do it!) I will show you by my works that I have faith. It is not enough to merely believe (i.e., to have faith). Even the demons believe but they surely are not saved from eternal hell. So, if you don't have works, then there is no reason for you to think that you really have saving faith (i.e., a faith which saves from eternal hell).

D. I submit that the objector's words go all the way through verse 19.

1. The main indicator of the change is speakers that most appeal to is the quotation marks.
2. There are no quotation marks in the original Greek.
3. A better indicator of the change of person would be a textual indicator (i.e., something in the words of the text itself).
4. The objector's words begin with James' introduction in verse 18, go all the way through verse 19.
5. James' response to the objector begins with the 'but' in verse 20.
 - a. Verse 20 begins James' response to the objector as indicated by the singular 'you.'
 - b. Again, James uses the singular 'you' in verse 22, indicating that he is responding to the objector.
6. James uses the plural 'you' in verse 24, indicating that he is returning back to his readers.

E. Thus, the argument according to these interpreters would be:

JAMES: A Christian's faith can either be dead or alive. The way to tell if faith is dead is whether or not there are works. If there are no works, then the faith is dead, and it cannot save physical life, neither the one whose faith it is nor anyone else's. (2:14-17; note the word 'profit' in verse 16)

OBJECTOR: There can't possibly be any connection between faith and works. You can't take your faith and demonstrate your works. I can't take my works and demonstrate my faith. Both are impossible. Even demons believe (have faith?) and surely, they don't have works. So, therefore, there isn't any connection whatsoever between faith and works. (2:18-19)

JAMES: You are a foolish man! Faith without works is dead. The only way that a Christian is justified (vindicated) before men that his faith is alive and not dead, is by the works that he does. Thus, Abraham was vindicated that his faith (which he exercised when he believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness; Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:2-3) was not dead when he offered up Isaac . . . Works animate faith. Just as a physical body without its spirit is dead, so likewise faith without works is dead. It is not the case that a physical body without its spirit is not a genuine body. Rather, a physical body without its spirit indicates a loss of its life. Thus, faith, in the life of the Christian, is dead if it has not works, but it is still genuine faith. It's just that it has died and is no longer profitable for life.

F. The upshot of this.

1. James is arguing that there is a visible connection between the Christian's faith and his works.
2. It is only by works that one's faith is shown (vindicated) to be alive.
3. This is so because it is by doing good works that the Christian's faith avoids being useless (1:26-27) and is instead profitable (2:14, 16)

James, Dead Faith, and the Hypothetical Objector: James 2:18-26
Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

James introduces the hypothetical objector.

{18} But someone will say,

This literary device of introducing a hypothetical objection or speaker is also used by Paul in Rom. 6:1; 9:19; 11:19; and 1 Cor. 15:35.

Hypothetical objector argues against James.

"You have faith, and I have works.^[1] Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." {19} You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble!^[2]

Some English translations insert quotation marks either here or here indicating the end of the objection, neither of which is warranted. Since there are no quotations marks in the original Greek, such decisions must be made on the basis of the grammar. It is more likely that the objector's words proceed through v. 19.

The objector appeals to the Shema (Deut 6:4) in his argument against James that faith and works are not related.

James responds to the hypothetical objector.

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

Conjunction *de* (δὲ, but) indicates change of speaker from hypothetical objector back to James.

Second person singular *theleis de gnonai* (θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι, do you want to know) and the use of the vocative *o anthrope kene* (ὦ ἄνθρωπε κενέ, O foolish man) indicate that James is speaking to the hypothetical objector.

Second person singular *blepeis* (βλέπεις, Do you see) indicates that James is continuing his response to the objector.

James returns to his readers.

{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.

Second person plural *orate toinun* (Ὠρᾶτε τοίνυν, You (pl.) see then) indicates James is speaking to his readers.

There are two justifications; one by faith and one by works. There is no single justification by both faith and works.

1. The word *monon* (μόνον, only) could not be an adjective modifying *pisteōs* (πίστεως, faith) since it does not agree in gender.

2. Rather, it is an adverb which modifies the understood verb 'justified.'

3. The text should read "a man is justified by works and not only [justified] by faith."

For materials which would argue for the interpretation of this passage that I am defending see:

Dillow, Joseph C. *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*. The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2013.

Hodges, Zane. *Absolutely Free*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989.

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Racmacher, Earl D. *Salvation*. Nashville: Word, 2000.

For materials which would argue the common evangelical interpretation (the "True, or Genuine, or Real Faith Necessarily Leads to Works" view) see:

Blue, J. Ronald. "James." In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., 835-827. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983.

Horton, Michael, ed. *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.

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_____. *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1993.

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