

The Epistle of James

Lesson # 9 Can Counterfeit Faith Save You? James 2:14-26

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I. Counterfeit Faith Is Worthless Because it Has No Power to Save James 2:14

"No true faith has arisen unless there has been a perception of the object to be believed or believed in, an assent to its worthiness to be believed or believed in, and a commitment of ourselves to it as true and trustworthy...We cannot be said to believe that which we distrust too much to commit ourselves to it."
B.B. Warfieldⁱ

"When the Barna Group uses the term *born again* to describe American church-goers whose lives are indistinguishable from the world, and who sin as much as the world, and sacrifice for others as little as the world, and embrace injustice as readily as the world and covet things as greedily as the world, and enjoy God-ignoring entertainment as much as the world – when the term *born again* is used to describe these professing Christians, the Barna Group is making a profound mistake. It is using the term *born again* in a way that would make it unrecognizable by Jesus and the biblical writers...

In other words, in this research the term *born again* refers to people who say things. They say, "I have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. It's important to me." They say, "I believe I will go to heaven when I die. I have confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior." Then the Barna Group takes them at their word, ascribes to them the infinitely important reality of the new birth, and then slanders that precious biblical reality by saying that regenerate hearts have no more victory over sin than unregenerate hearts.

I'm not saying their research is wrong. It appears to be appallingly right. I am not saying that the church is not as worldly as they say it is. I am saying that the writers of the New Testament think in exactly the opposite direction about being born again. Instead of moving from a profession of faith to the label *born again*, to the worldliness of these so-called *born again* people, to the conclusion that the new birth does not radically change people, the New Testament moves in the other direction. It moves from the absolute certainty that the new birth radically changes people, to the observation that many professing Christians are indeed (as the Barna Group says) not radically changed, to the conclusion that they are not born again. The New Testament, unlike the Barna Group, does not defile the new birth with the worldliness of unregenerate, professing Christians." John Piperⁱⁱ

The remainder of chapter 2 now focuses squarely on the characteristics of real faith. These 13 verses touch on an immensely important truth – perhaps one of the greatest truths we will encounter in the NT. It serves as a bromide against easy believism, antinomianism and careless living by believers, and helps define real belief, and thus, real faith for us. Is the faith you claim to possess strong enough to support your theology throughout your life – through good times as well as the inevitable bad times? Will it comfort you on your death bed or at the death-bed of a loved one? Short of Jesus' return in our lifetime, we will all face death and will have a legacy to look back on, so what will be your legacy reveal about your faith?

This section connects strongly to the doctrines of perseverance and sanctification, and does not contradict any NT / Reformation doctrine of Sola Fide, Sola Gracia, Solo Christus, or Sole Deo Gloria. It is not about how we are saved (in the sense that Romans has that as its central theme), but what our salvation looks like as we live it out. James uses examples from the lives of Abraham and Rahab to show us that real faith is inevitably exposed by what a true believer does when decisions are made in response to their faith. At no time does James put the cart before the horse. He is completely biblical in the sense that faith is there first, then works. People's works do not provide the grounds for their faith, but rather their works are evidence that they possess faith. If we keep this in mind, we will see that James does not contradict Paul, as so many want to try to prove.

Regarding our works as a means to righteousness and salvation, here is what Tom Schriener says;

"Ultimately, our obedience is too paltry and imperfect to function as the basis for righteousness on the last day. Everything we do, as long as we are still in our mortal bodies, is still tainted with sin...Our obedience could never function as the basis for our righteousness because God demands perfect obedience, and only Christ obeyed perfectly."ⁱⁱⁱ

It is not as if James alone poses this position regarding genuine faith. The modern problem regarding teaching such as we find in James 2 is that NA people have been conditioned (stronger – brainwashed?) by blathering evangelists, perhaps well-meaning, but way off the mark – to believe that faith is rooted in a decision, an isle walked, a card signed, a prayer recited, etc. rather than one having been made alive by the Holy Spirit, exercised God-given faith & repentance, having become a new creation and living a life that reflects Christlikeness and holiness because we are in Christ.

An example of this is the Lordship Controversy that raged in the 1980's with chief participants being Zane Hodges, the Free Grace proponent^{iv}, and John MacArthur, the Lordship view.^v The crux of the debate – which was by no means friendly – centered on the very theme of James 2. Can someone be saved by a profession of faith unaccompanied by neither repentance nor works or fruit that support their professed faith? Lordship people say no, free grace people say yes. James says no, and in fact, the entire Bible says NO.

The sentimental faction likes to think that since "Christ has done it all", we must simply believe, "accept Jesus into our hearts" as Saviour, and then live any way we choose, having obtained 'fire insurance' which can be redeemed at the death in the form of a ticket to heaven. However, this sub-biblical theology ignores passages like: Matt. 7:21-23; 10:32-33; JN 15:6; 8:30-32; and 3:6 in the Gospels and numerous warning passages and calls for introspection throughout the rest of the NT – Gal. 5:19-21; 6:8; Rom. 10:16; 2:6,7-10. According to such passages, true believers will be known to be so by how they conduct their lives and whether or not they imitate Christ or the world.

Verse 14 – as many of the better teachers do, James begins this section with a question, and his purpose is to get us to think about the nature of faith. If faith is not accompanied by good works, can that faith save? Without much thinking, a typical modern reply would be to cite Ephesians 2:8-9. However, in my experience, those who quote these 2 verses by rote have never considered verse 10. Most are even more ignorant of Phil. 2:12-13.

This is a topic that scares us, because of our NA evangelical heritage. We all realise that, all too often, our lives do not reflect or exhibit the sorts of works that support our claim of love for Christ and faith in Him. But isn't it better to consider our shortcomings and potentially fatally deficient faith now rather than hear the announcement of Matt. 7:21-13, when it's too late to change our eternal destiny?

It does not boil down to "Have I done enough good works?" or "Am I achieving sinless perfection?" The Bible, from OT to NT never gives us the impression that believers are perfect. Even in Hebrews 11, the list of faithful Bible heroes associates virtually every one of them with sinful flaws – some huge – yet they are in heaven because of their faith. Even Samson, as flawed as he was is listed in Heb. 11:32 as a faithful believer.

Schreiner again comments on the sort of actions that reveal true belief, in the context of heeding warning passages, but applicable here in principle;

"The warnings are addressed to believers and threaten them with eternal destruction if they fall away. I would contend that all true believers (all the elect, all those who have the Holy Spirit and enjoy the forgiveness of sins and are members of the New Covenant) heed the warnings and are thereby saved. In other words, the warnings are one of the means God uses to keep his own trusting him and persevering in faith to the end. Such perseverance must not be equated with perfection. It is nothing other than clinging to the cross of Christ for the forgiveness of sins until the last day....Those who persevere are those who are conscious of the fact that they are blind, miserable, poor and naked until the last day. They look to the righteousness of Christ for their salvation, not to their own perseverance. And yet they do persevere in trusting Christ. They do not abandon Him finally and definitively. The warnings provoke them to continue to look to Christ and his righteousness."^{vi} -

So sinless perfection is not what James has in mind here, but he is saying quite clearly that one's true heart will be revealed in what they do in response to life's challenges. But that is not to say that sin in our lives as believers is not an indicator of our hearts. We do sin, and some of the actions James writes about are sinful, but his approach is practical – going to the heart of how such sin manifests itself in specific ways, like illustrations. As we begin to look at vv. 15-16, the answer to James's rhetorical question (the answer is presupposed) is "No, that faith cannot save!" Note: Titus 3:8; I Tim. 1:3-5.

He illustrates his point, moving on to the end of chapter 2, as he uses 4 case studies, and then ends at v. 26 with a conclusion. First – vv. 15-17, the lack of deeds of compassion for brethren in need; second – vv. 18-20, even demons believe, but their belief will not save them; third – vv. 21-24, Abraham was justified by his actions of offering up Isaac on Mt. Moriah in Genesis 22; and fourth – v. 25, Rahab, a Gentile, proved she had real faith when she hid the Israeli spies in Jericho. James will

conclude in v. 26 that, “faith that justifies proves it is alive by its deeds. Conversely, faith without works is dead.”^{vii}

II. Counterfeit Faith Is Worthless Because it Cannot Save Others James 2:15-17

“Can authentic faith find expression in a confession of right doctrine alone? Can authentic faith be expressed merely as sentiment that never reaches the point of action? Or is it by necessity a faith that goes beyond these to include practical action?”^{viii}

This first illustration by James is intensely practical, especially for his day, when there were no government ‘safety nets’ to catch people who lost a job, got injured or sick and thus fell into intense poverty, even for a temporary period. Few people were rich, and most worked just to keep up with daily needs – to eat, have a roof over their heads, and clothing. There would not be much, if anything left over, and people with money to spare were rare. Today, this problem exists but is more subtle in the times it crops up in our fellow church members’ lives. Since welfare, UIC, disability insurance, etc. exist, and people who are not self-sufficient tend to be frowned on by society, and even if we are honest, can be somewhat shunned in the church, there can be a disconnect by believers regarding how much help people they know really need, and often, they – in turn - are too ashamed to let us know.

James may be addressing a real event that had taken place in the church, and that’s why he doesn’t limit the illustration to an individual, but mentions two people – a man and a woman. The people he has in mind are poorly clothed, with few or perhaps tattered clothing, and obviously socially ‘beneath’ someone of a bit more comfortable means. They also lacked daily food – maybe for only a day or two, or maybe chronically. His point? It’s obvious this couple is in dire straits; they don’t have to express it, it is that obvious. So what do we, as Christians, do about it?

His shocking hypothetical reply is found in v. 16. This is so blatantly ungodly that we almost say to ourselves, “I would never say that!” Wouldn’t we? Haven’t we? Well, maybe not in those particular words, but we have all said to someone in need, “I’ll pray for you.” Now, there is power in prayer, no question [if you remember to actually pray for that person], but at a time like James is describing, that sentence is appropriate only if accompanied by action, like, “I’ll pray for you, and come back to the house for lunch and a coffee.” Or “I’ll pray for you, but here’s \$ 100 to help you today.” This is a no-brainer if you have read your Bible and have the means to help this way. Note: I JN 3:10,16-18; 4:7-21; Deut. 15:7; MT 25:33-40 and conversely, MT 25:41-46. Christians are to love one another, and that goes beyond warm, fond feelings. It means discerning when someone you know is in some trouble, struggling with financial or emotional issues. They may not come right out and say it, or they may ask for prayer concerning some severe distress, and if you have faith, and the means, you will do something.

Verse 17 caps it off. If you have the means to help, you will, or your faith is exposed as dead. It will never save you. In Eph. 4:22-28, Paul shows how a Christian acts as he or she demonstrates a renewed mind and puts off old ways. Especially for our purpose here, note v. 28. What is (at least one) the reason we work and earn money? Not to buy every new gadget in sight and the most expensive car and house we can afford, but to be in a position to share with those in need, especially our own loved ones – both biological and church families. Obviously, we cannot always be in a position to do a lot, but surely we can do something, thoughtfully. If one is sick, bring them food or run to the store to get their medicine or provisions, or cut their grass for them. Calling them on the phone may cause them undue stress as they may be too sick to answer a phone, but that could be a good place to start. Deal with their need according to your ability, but do something. Talk is cheap.

Discussion question: Is it possible to do these kinds of charitable acts and the acts not be evidence of saving Faith? What or who are some examples?

III. Demonic Belief

James 2:18-19

In v. 18, James is using a literary device known as a diatribe where a hypothetical person asks a question so that James can clarify his position as if he were in a debate or conversation. Paul also used this sort of argumentation – ie.) in Romans 9:18-20.

What the ‘objector’ is saying is this: “You’ve been given good works, but I’ve been given the gift of faith.”, and faith is a gift, but true faith is accompanied by good works (Eph. 2:8-10). James retorts, “*Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*” How could anyone ever prove faith without showing works? Yet, true faith can be displayed. Good works make faith visible. “It is vindicated by a life of holiness and good deeds.”^{ix} Just as Christ’s resurrection vindicated and verified that what He said and did was true, and that His sacrifice on behalf of His elect was successful, so works of love flow outward from a life that God has saved, verifying that the person does possess real faith. True faith is, however, much more than just accurate theological orthodoxy, but it is never less than that.

Douglas Moo points out something very helpful here,

“It is a good thing to possess an accurate theology, but it is unsatisfactory unless that good theology also possesses us. The warning applies especially to people like me who study and teach theology day in and day out. CS Lewis is said to have warned new Christians about going into the ministry for fear that contact with “holy things” would render them commonplace. Those of us in ministry must beware the danger that our theology – accurate and well stated as it may be – degenerate likewise into a verbal exercise.

The demons perfectly illustrate the poverty of verbal profession in and of itself. They are among the most orthodox of theologians, James suggests, agreeing wholeheartedly with the *shema*... Yet what is their reaction? They shudder.”^x

Here is the quintessential faith without substance – ‘head knowledge’ and it will not save. Demons are never going to end up in heaven – the Bible is perfectly clear on that point, and the demons know it too. They are not being redeemed by their knowledge,

but instead, a place has been reserved for them in eternity in hell once God's purpose for them has been fulfilled. Note these passages: MT 25:41; 8:29; MK. 1:24; 5:7; LK 4:34; 8:31.

Verse 19 – you think your 'faith' is special because you believe correctly regarding God? Good for you, but even demons go that far. The phrase "you do well" is not a compliment, it is meant to convey the same type of sarcasm that you would hear from a buddy when you fumble a baseball, and he says, "Good catch".^{xi} Demons probably have a knowledge of God & Christ that transcends your own because they knew Christ before they fell with Satan, and they understand His power and authority, and even realise where history is heading (cf. Rev. 12:12). A demon could likely outgun a great theologian in Bible memorization yet they believe...and shudder. Brian Vickers rightly comments regarding the demons; "Although they face such dire circumstances, their "faith" could rise no higher than mere recognition of Jesus as the Son of God, and terror. So the demons 'believe' in Jesus; that is, they believe who He is, but clearly they do not trust in Him as Lord (whether they could do so is beside the point)^{xii}. The demons still remain demonic, but at least they have one physical response to their 'belief', they shudder.

IV. Abraham

James 2:20-24; Genesis 22

It is in these 5 verses that many theologians claim that James contradicts Paul regarding justification by grace through faith. It was these verses that led Martin Luther to claim that James is "a right strawy epistle." This makes it extremely important that we understand what James is saying here, and what he is not saying. I hope to convince you that what James is saying is not only not contradictory to Paul, but actually complements him.

James continues with the diatribe, continuing to respond to the hypothetical objector again in v. 20. IOW, James is saying, "pay attention and I'll show you from the Bible that *"faith apart from works is useless."*

In Paul's extant writing, Romans is the book where he most succinctly provides theological evidence for justification by grace through faith (especially Rom. 3:21-26), as well as in Rom. 4 where Paul puts forth Abraham as an OT example of this, but to say that James is responding to Paul and Romans is chronologically impossible. James wrote this epistle in the 40's, and Romans was not written until about 57 AD. Not only that, but to say that James is wrong on this point impugns the Holy Spirit, the real author of Scripture, as writing contradictory doctrine.

James R. White rightly says,

"The subject in Romans is the grand work of God in Christ whereby He makes men right with Himself, establishing peace through justification by faith. James is writing to Christians about how they are to live their lives as believers. One involves a focus upon what God has done in Christ, the other upon what our response should be in light of that work. One is written to Christians about the gospel, the other is written to Christians about how they are to live having embraced that gospel."^{xiii}

Here is a comparison of the two key verses of the controversy:

James 2:24: "...a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."

Romans 3:28: "...one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."

James White says, "We have already seen that James is arguing against a use of the word faith (a deedless, dead, empty, useless faith that exists only in the realm of words and not action) that is not paralleled in the Pauline passages that speak of how one is justified...Paul speaks of justification "before God" in Gal. 3:11, or "in His sight" (Romans 3:20), while the context of James is "show me". The assertion that the verbal parallels override the immediate contexts must be rejected, for it has no basis. James's use must be allowed to stand on its own."^{xiv}

We cannot divorce these 5 verses from the remainder of James's context from 2:1 and following. Again, James White points out, "What is vital to note is that the nature of the polemic does not change, either: James is still exhorting Christians to live in light of their profession of faith "in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1). This is vital, for the context of 2:14-26 must be fully integrated into the exegesis. The meaning of such terms as "faith", "works", and "justify" cannot be ascertained outside of the context in which James uses them. James 2:14 forms a single argument: verse 26 could be quoted immediately after verse 14 and the meaning would remain intact...While true faith is noted (by contrast) in the section, the point is the same all the way through: deedless faith is not saving faith."^{xv}

Because Abraham is a central personality in the national existence of Israel, and James and most of the converts he wrote to were originally Jews, it is highly relevant to bring him into the argument (just as Paul does in Romans 4). James is not using Abraham as a counter-argument against Paul's yet-to-be written position but because he's relevant to the people he is writing to.

Whereas Paul, in keeping with the context of his point regarding how Abraham was justified (born again, saved by grace through faith), in Rom. 4:1-25 provides a lengthy argument supporting what he had said in Rom. 3:21ff. James, on the other hand is not concerned as much with how Abraham began his life of faith, but by how certain things he did proved or verified that his faith was real. What was the strongest evidence James could muster to show this? James White explains this aspect of the debate well regarding Genesis 22;

"Even God's own words point to this *demonstration* of faith in the act of obedience, for surely what else could God mean when He says, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing against him; for *now I know* that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:12 NASB) than that Abraham was *given evidence* of the faith he possessed decades earlier in Genesis 15:6? Surely God knew of the reality of the faith that was Abraham's when He declared Abraham righteous. But it is the *demonstration* of that faith in Abraham's *actions* that draws James's attention. As Johnson observes, "James sees the offering of Isaac as the *demonstration* of this faith rather than its replacement." This is exactly the point that is brought out clearly in verses 22-23 with the citation of Genesis 15:6 and the discussion of the perfection of faith."^{xvi} (emphasis in original)

This is precisely why James selects this passage from the OT, so that his readers would be very familiar with it, and it expresses his point perfectly. Where did Abraham's faith go to be exercised? See Hebrews 11:17-19. Here is how his faith worked – he actually considered this in his mind; "God wants me to sacrifice Isaac, the

very son I waited decades for, the one He promised would be the beginning of a great multitude of descendants (Gen. 15:1-21), the son of promise. So, if God wants me to do this, which humanly would make the fulfillment of God's promise impossible, then, assuming I go through with it, God must plan to resurrect Isaac from the dead!" that is incidentally, something that had never happened yet in Abraham's time or before. But Abraham's faith in God was so strong that he believed that God had that sort of power, and that was the way Abraham presumed that God would keep His promise. If Isaac died, and was not resurrected, what would that say about God's promises & power? So Abraham chose to trust God even when trusting God seemed very risky, potentially painful, and outside of the realm of the normal possibility of any good coming from it.

Verses 22-23 – James now adds that his readers should see that “*faith was active*”, that “faith was completed by his works.” James wants his readers to see that there is a tight relationship that exists between faith and the works which flow out from that faith. The idea that saving faith could even exist without fruit or deeds is what James is denying. Abraham could not be seen as a man of faith if there was nothing he ever exhibited to show what he had faith in. It is simply not possible that James thought Abraham had no works of faith between Genesis 15 & Genesis 22, but the episode of his life in Genesis 22 was such a huge and unique indicator of faith that it stands head and shoulders over any other event in Abraham's life. Again, James White makes an excellent point here:

“Abraham's offering of Isaac did not change the nature of his faith relationship with God: it showed that relationship, begun decades earlier, was real, living, vital and demonstrable. The perfection of the faith by the deeds did not change the faith, but showed that it was real faith, not just said, but actual, a matter of the heart, not just the mind.”^{xvii}

Although this (v. 23) is a quote of Genesis 15:6, which is when Abraham was ‘saved’, years later, at Mt. Moriah, the reality of the faith Abraham had possessed since Genesis 15:6 was unquestionably demonstrated by his obedience in offering up Isaac – something he would have carried out had the angel of the Lord not stayed his hand in Gen. 22:11-12. The Scripture was fulfilled in this act of obedience not by an addition of something, an action by Abraham as a means of justification, but by the demonstration that Abraham had really believed back in Gen. 15:6.

Perhaps a parallel concept might be helpful here. Look at [Rom. 3:26](#). There is no question about God's justice and righteousness before the Cross. Yet, Paul here talks about the cross being a demonstration (show) of His righteousness. Why was it in question? Because God had ‘passed over’ OT sins – people were saved on credit in a sense. They were not sent to Hell at death because their redemption was a surety (to them) yet future. Once Jesus died, God's saving people by faith was revealed as just, and He could now be the justifier of those with that faith in Christ before He was ever “on earth” with His people in the flesh or gave His life as a ransom. In a similar way, Abraham's faith existed, but the Genesis 22 demonstration revealed how real it really was and sealed his justification in a sense.

James adds, and this is not a quote from the OT, “and he was called a friend of God.” This may simply reflect the Jewish view of Abraham as a special representative of God, because of his faith. Almost in a formulaic way, James summarises his point in v. 24. But James’s point is that Christians will be obedient, and will act on what they believe.

Thomas Manton, a Puritan writer, comments on v. 24:

“Works are an evidence of true faith. Graces are not dead, useless habits; they will have some effects and operations when they are weakest and in their infancy...This is the evidence by which we must judge, and this is the evidence by which Christ will judge...Works are not a ground of confidence, but an evidence; not the foundations of faith, but the encouragements of assurance. Comfort may be increased by the sight of good works, but it is not built upon them; they are seeds of hope, not props of confidence; sweet evidences of election, not causes; happy presages and beginnings of glory; in short, they can manifest an interest, but not merit it.”^{xviii}

Brian Vickers gets the last word in this section of the lesson:

“...Anyone who thinks that obedience is less important or necessary to Paul than to James has simply never read Paul closely enough. The same can be said of anyone who thinks that James is practically a second-string apostle. We desperately need them both, and only by preaching and teaching both do we have an opportunity to guard against the extremes of antinomianism and legalism...like James, we must be bold to tell people that no amount of confessional orthodoxy is enough to save anyone, and that being a dyed-in-the-wool believer of justification by faith is not the same thing as trusting in Christ for salvation.”^{xix}

V. Rahab

James 2:25; Joshua 2:8-11

Now James moves away from the godly Abraham, the father of Israel, to a Gentile prostitute, a more minor character, but important nonetheless to his argument. Her fear of God led her to hide the Israeli spies when they came to her to determine the defences of Jericho – cf. [Joshua 2:1-21](#). Notice vv. 9-11 – this is Rahab’s confession of faith, the reason she goes against her own people and protects the spies from being discovered and killed. She even lied for them (vv. 4-5), although we should not see that as a justification of lying. Her faith was a true faith in what she knew about God, which was also, in a real sense, a fulfillment of God’s pledge in [Ex. 9:14-16](#); [Deut. 11:25](#). God’s fame had spread to Canaan and here was one woman, not godly, but a pagan harlot, who heard the news, believed and acted when she was given opportunity. Her actions prove her faith was real.

An intellectual conversion to Judaistic ideals would not have saved her. Only her actions demonstrated her faith. She aligned herself with Israel, the enemy of her people, a drastic and treasonous move, but she felt compelled to show what she believed about Israel’s God in the only way she could. She lied, she hid them, let them down on a rope to escape, and then faithfully tied a scarlet cord from her window to be seen when the attack came, and she would be rescued from harm along with her family. All of these were acts of real faith. She did not thus earn salvation, but what she did was proof of what would otherwise have been a sketchy claim to faith, but she truly did fear God once she heard who He was and heard of His power against Egypt.

We find her mentioned in the light of faith in Hebrews 11:31 and as part of the line of Christ in Matthew 1:5-6. She became David's Great-Great Grandmother.

VI. The Role of Repentance

We usually think of repentance only as something that accompanies salvation at the very beginning of our conversion. Verses like LK 5:31-32; 13:3,5; MT 4:17; Rom. 2:4; II Cor. 7:10; 2 Pet. 3:9; Acts 17:30 & 3:19 point to the critical nature of repentance in the gospel message, but too often, we think this; "Well, I repent by turning from my sin when confronted by the gospel, and I recognise it and turn from it towards Jesus, and then I live by faith." So repentance is often not considered again except when we hear a sermon on one of the above verses.

Although James does not use the word "repentance", surely he understands that the works Christians do are tied inexorably to repentance. A main component of the Lordship Salvation controversy, which flared up in the 1980's, but had been simmering for years within evangelicalism, was the issue of repentance and its role in salvation, especially with regard to how people who claimed to be saved lived out their lives. James understood this issue, although he predated the actual controversy here by almost 1950 years.

As early as 1937, H.A., Ironside made this statement, "The doctrine of repentance is the missing note in many otherwise orthodox and fundamentally sound circles today."^{xx} He also wrote, "Shallow preaching does not grapple with the terrible fact of man's sinfulness and guilt, calling on 'all men everywhere to repent', results in shallow conversions; and so we have myriads of glib-tongued professors today who give no evidence regeneration whatsoever. Prating of salvation by grace, they manifest no grace in their lives. Loudly declaring they are justified by faith alone, they fail to remember that 'faith without works is dead'; and that justification by works before men is not to be ignored as though it were a contradiction to justification by faith before God."^{xxi}

Contrary to the biblical argument of Ironside, Lewis Sperry Chafer called repentance, "one of the more common features of human responsibility which are too often added to the one requirement of faith or belief."^{xxii} Thomas L. Constable wrote in 1982, "repentance means to change one's mind, it does not mean to change one's life."^{xxiii} This sort of muddled "theological" thinking is what the "easy believism" bandwagon runs on, and is exactly what James is battling against when he writes James 2:17,24,26 – the idea that one could be truly saved and have no works to demonstrate the reality of that salvation is unheard of in the Bible.

But why do I say that this can be equated with repentance? Isn't it really more related to sanctification? There are a lot of verses that tie repentance to what we do as believers; Jonah 3:10 ("when God saw what they did); Isaiah 1:16-20; 55:6-7; II Chron. 7:14; LK 3:7-14; & Acts 26:19-20. Isn't repentance what all these verses are talking about?

What these, and other verses are saying is that true conversion is always accompanied by a sincere change in one's lifestyle – cf. II Cor. 5:17-21 – so that one who has

genuine repentance ceases from his/her evil ways and begins to strive for holiness and righteous living. It is repentance that begins (and continues to produce) this change in one's conduct, forging a new direction in their life. We recognise that this new direction can have moments of stumbling, and so one who is living a repentant, faithful life will seek the remedy of such verses as I JN 1:9 as often as needed. Repentance does not make us sinless, but it does motivate us to seek that level of living inasmuch as the Holy Spirit empowers us to be obedient to God's word.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones also comments on this topic, "Repentance means that you realize that you are a guilty, vile sinner in the presence of God, that you deserve the wrath and punishment of God, that you are hell-bound. It means that you begin to realize that this thing called sin is in you, that you long to get rid of it, and that you turn your back on its every shape and form. You renounce the world whatever the cost, the world in its mind and outlook as well as its practice, and you deny yourself, and take up your cross and go after Christ. Your nearest and dearest, and the whole world, may call you a fool, or say you have religious mania. You may have to suffer financially, but it makes no difference. That is repentance."^{xxiv}

Geerhardus Vos adds, "Repentance is not limited to any single faculty of the mind: it engages the entire man, intellect, will and affections...Again, in the new life which follows repentance the absolute supremacy of God is the controlling principle. He who repents turns away from the service of mammon to the service of God."^{xxv} And JI Packer interjects, "The repentance that Christ requires of His people consists in a settled refusal to set any limit to the claims which He may make on their lives."^{xxvi}

"Repentance is not a one-time act. The repentance that takes place at conversion begins a progressive, lifelong process of confession (I JN 1:9). This active, continuous attitude of repentance produces the poverty of spirit, mourning and meekness Jesus spoke of in the Beattitudes. It is the mark of every believer."^{xxvii} John MacArthur

VII. One Final Point

James 2:26

Having said all he's said over the past 2 chapters, James summarizes his position with a simple illustration – body & spirit vs faith & works. Once the spirit leaves the body, the body is dead. Paul makes this point in II Cor. 5:8 – to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The spirit goes to be with the Lord, but the body goes into the grave, until it is resurrected and rejoined to its spirit at the Rapture – cf. I Cor. 15:50-58; Romans 8:23. Think of Jesus as He died on the cross, and as He expired, the words, "Into Your hands I commend My Spirit." Then, He breathed His last. The spirit remains alive – in one place or another, but the body is dead and decays (but not Christ's of course – cf. Acts 2:27).

In a similar way, faith without works to reveal it, is dead and will decay, and James aptly demonstrates that for us over the last chapter especially. Faith without works can never save anyone. If it is professed or expressed without any visible signs that it is real, then it is counterfeit.

Question for discussion: Why do people profess faith when they do not possess it?

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- ⁱ B.B. Warfield, as cited in John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Anniversary Edition, 1988, 2008, Zondervan, p. 268
- ⁱⁱ John Piper, *Finally Alive – What Happens When We Are Born Again*; Christian Focus, 2009, pp. 13-15
- ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize*, Crossway, 2010, p. 71
- ^{iv} Zane Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege* (1981); *Absolutely Free* (1989) – The Grace Evangelical Society
- ^v John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1988); *Faith Works* (1993)
- ^{vi} Schreiner, *IBIB*, p. 92
- ^{vii} Doriani, James, p. 82
- ^{viii} Nystrom, pp. 147-148
- ^{ix} Doriani, p. 87
- ^x Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Eerdmans – Pillar NT Commentary, 2000, pp. 130-131
- ^{xi} Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace Through Faith*, P & R, 2013, p. 149
- ^{xii} *IBID*, p. 150
- ^{xiii} James R. White, *Scripture Alone*, Bethany House, 2004, pp. 166-167
- ^{xiv} James R. White, *The God Who Justifies*, Bethany House, 2001, p. 346
- ^{xv} *IBID*, p. 331
- ^{xvi} *IBID*, p. 347
- ^{xvii} *IBID*, p.349
- ^{xviii} Thomas Manton, from his commentary on James, as cited by John MacArthur in *The Gospel According to Jesus*, *What is Authentic Faith?*, Zondervan, Anniversary Edition, 2008; p. 262
- ^{xix} Vickers, *IBID*, p. 161
- ^{xx} H.A. Ironside, from his book, *“Except Ye Repent”*, Zondervan, 1937, p. 7 – as cited by John MacArthur in *The Gospel According to Jesus*, Anniversary Issue, Zondervan, 1988, 2008, p. 175
- ^{xxi} *IBID*, p. 176
- ^{xxii} *IBID*, p. 176
- ^{xxiii} Thomas Constable, in an essay entitled, *“The Gospel Message”*, in Walvoort, *A Tribute*, Moody, 1982, p. 207, edited by Donald Campbell
- ^{xxiv} From MacArthur, p.180 / out of Lloyd-Jones’ book, *The Sermon on the Mount*
- ^{xxv} *IBID*, p. 179. D.M. Lloyd-Jones
- ^{xxvi} *IBID*, p. 179 J.I. Packer
- ^{xxvii} *IBID* – John MacArthur