



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V25 N41 October 8, 2023

I BELIEVE "Proving Faith" James 2:14-26

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Salvation by Grace

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast."

Ephesians 2:8-9



How do "good works" relate to salvation?

Salvation, is all about grace. We cannot earn our salvation through our own efforts. Salvation is a free gift from God. We can do nothing to earn this grace from God. Yet historically there have been debates throughout the centuries of church life on how we receive God's grace.

For hundreds of years, the Catholic Church has taught that grace comes through the practice or receipt of what are called "sacraments." The number of sacraments has fluctuated over time. Finally in 1549 at the Council of Trent the Catholic Church approved seven sacraments that promised to dispense grace in small amounts as believers participate in sacred services provided by the Church. The Catholic Church's teaching is that if you faithfully participate in these activities, most often administered by a priest, you will accumulate grace for entrance into eternity. Some of these sacraments would include the forgiveness of sins and preparation for death.

Over time, the Catholic Church has taught that grace could also be dispensed in additional offerings, vows or prayers to certain saints. Instead of receiving God's grace once and for all in a faith expression of conversion (Rom. 10:9-10), the Catholic Church has taught that grace is dispensed through a "drip system" of sacraments and ceremonies that would be pursued for a follower's lifetime. The hope for most Catholics is that enough grace would be accumulated in a lifetime of sacraments to allow for entrance into heaven after death. This Catholic distribution system of grace reached a point of significant abuse in the 1500s when the church started selling indulgences that promised to dispense mercy and grace for a fee or donation. Reformers like Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin separated from the Catholic Church and taught a more biblical "Grace Alone through Faith Alone" understanding of salvation where grace came to believers through faith directly from God without the assistance of priests, rites or indulgences.

Today, the Free Church (also known as the Protestant Church) invites people to participate

not in sacraments that are claimed to dispense grace, but in ordinances (baptism and communion), preaching and worship, prayer and service, community and volunteerism, among other activities, not to get grace but to express gratitude for God's saving grace that comes through faith alone in Jesus Christ as a free gift. Ordinances point back to the death and resurrection of Christ who offers us grace (John 1:17) through his sacrifice as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Faith alone in Jesus offers forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) and grace for salvation (Eph. 2:8-9).

"Good works" or "deeds" (James 2:14-26) do not get us any extra grace or any special considerations from God. We do not have to pay God back for his grace, nor do we have to accumulate grace by frequent interaction with sacraments or services of the church. We may be rewarded by God for good things we do, but doing good things for God does not earn us access into heaven and eternity. We do "good works" or "deeds" to show our love for God and our love for our neighbors without receiving extra grace along the way as the result of our service. The book of James challenges us repeatedly to extend love and compassion to those in need (James 1:27; 2:5-9; 2:15-16; 3:13-18; 4:10-11; 5:13-20). This service to others is not to obtain grace but to extend grace to others who are in need.

From the pages of the Bible, we understand that grace is provided to us immediately upon faith in Christ. God is gracious to us continually and we do not have to do "deeds" or "works" to experience God's grace. We do not expect to earn any grace or mercy from faithful service or devotion. We do "good works" or "deeds" because we are already children of God through faith and not as a means to become or remain children of God. "Good works" do not result in salvation. Rather, salvation through God's free gift of grace produces in us righteousness that leads to good works. We do good works because we have experienced God's goodness as his followers. We do not do good works to become his followers. Good works serve as "proof" of the faith that we already have.

Read James 2:14-26

14 *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?* 15 *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.* 16 *If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?* 17 *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

18 *But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."*

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. 19 *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.*

20 *You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?* 21 *Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?* 22 *You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.* 23 *And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend.* 24 *You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.*

25 *In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?* 26 *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. [NIV]*

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle each occurrence of the word "faith" in James 2:14-26.
- Draw a box around each occurrence of "deeds," "do," "did," "does," or "action(s)" in James 2:14-26.
- Draw an arrow from the word "save" in James 2:14 to phrases that have a similar meaning in James 2:21 and 2:25.
- Underline each occurrence of "dead" or "useless" in James 2:14-26.
- Double underline each occurrence of "show," "evidence," and "see" in James 2:14-26.
- Draw an arrow from each proper name in James 2:20-26 to what each was considered.
- Put brackets around negative words or phrases in James 2:14-16.
- Double circle the subject James 2:24.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. What words or themes from James chapter 1 do you see repeated in James 2:14-26?
 2. A claim of faith without “deeds” or “works” cannot save (James 2:14). Describe James’ use of save/salvation (Consider James 1:21; 4:12; 5:15; 5:20).
 3. How does James’ example (2:15-16) illustrate the truth of James 2:17?
 4. According to James 2:18, what is the purpose for “deeds” or “good works”?
 5. Explain what point is being made about faith and works in James 2:19.
 6. Abraham was declared righteous by God. James 2:21 claims this was done by something he did and James 2:23 claims this was done because he believed or had faith in God. Explain how these two claims work together.
 7. Who is the “assessor” or “examiner” of righteousness described in James 2:24? How does this contribute to James’ lesson on faith and works?
 8. Contrast Rahab’s faith and works with Abraham’s faith and works.
 9. How is faith dead without “deeds” or “good works?”
 10. How does James 2:14-26 make you think differently about your life of faith?
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Commentary On The Text

No consideration of faith would be complete without a journey through James 2:14-26. Much of the Apostle Paul's life was spent combating Judaizers who wanted to make Gentile believers in Jesus, keepers of the Mosaic Law. James, the brother of Jesus, offered answers to a different audience, those perhaps too libertine in their approach to godliness. Paul and James "do not stand face to face, fighting against each other, but they stand back to back, fighting opposite foes" (J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee, Vol. 5*, 649).

The book of James dispenses wisdom to followers of Jesus. He describes how believers should endure, behave, serve, control, humble themselves and pray as individuals and a community. "Few books of the Bible have been more maligned than the little Book of James. Controversy has waged over its authorship, its date, its recipients, its canonicity, and its unity. It is well known that Martin Luther had problems with this book. He called it a 'right strawy epistle.' But it is only 'strawy' to the degree it is 'sticky.' There are enough needles in this haystack to prick the conscience of every dull, defeated, and degenerated Christian in the world. Here is a 'right stirring epistle' designed to exhort and encourage, to challenge and convict, to rebuke and revive, to describe practical holiness and drive believers toward the goal of a faith that works. James is severely ethical and refreshingly practical. Considered one of the General Epistles, James, like the epistles of Peter, John, and Jude, is an encyclical addressed not to individual churches or persons but to a larger sphere of believers" (J. Ronald Blue, "James," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 814).

In James 2:14-26 (the longest discourse in the book of James), the faith of believers in Jesus is challenged to be more evident than cerebral. "James attacks superficial and inconsistent Christians who claim they have faith but fail to act on the basis of their faith. Such a 'faith', James says, amounts to no more than a verbal profession—such as the confession that 'God is one' (v. 19). A 'faith' that is apart from 'deeds', or 'works' (vv. 20, 26), is dead (vv. 17 and 26) and 'useless' (v. 20). It does not have the power to save (v. 14) or to justify (v. 24). True biblical faith issues in 'deeds' (vv. 14, 17); it works along with active obedience and is 'completed by' works (v. 22). It is the kind of faith exhibited by both the revered 'father' of faith, Abraham (vv. 21-23), and Rahab, the immoral outcast (v. 25). It is absolutely vital to understand that the main point of this argument, expressed three times (in vv. 17, 20 and 26), is not that works are a kind of second, unrelated, addition to faith but that genuine faith naturally produces works" (Douglas J. Moo, *James*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, 132). We do not do "good works" to become believers or to obtain grace from God. Instead we do "good works" because we are believers. A duck does not paddle on the pond to become a duck. It paddles because it is already a duck. A person of faith in Jesus is a person of active expressions of faith that "perfects" or completes" (James

2:22) the inner life of faith.

James asked a number of questions in this treatment of faith (James 2:14, 16, 20, 21, 25). He provided a number of examples (James 2:15-16, 19, 21-23, 25, 26). He also introduced an "objector" and a "diatribe" (James 2:18-20). He closed this discussion with two compelling examples of faith who exhibited faith and were "considered righteous" for such faith.

Much confusion of interpretation has risen from James' 2:14-26. Some have mistakenly interpreted this discussion to mean that a person could lose their salvation if they did not exhibit sufficient "works" in combination with faith. We are not saved "by works" (Eph. 2:8-9). Instead, the result of salvation by grace through faith is God working his power through us to do good works to his honor and glory (Eph. 2:10). To claim to have faith, but never express that faith through acts of service is "no good" (James 2:14,16), "ineffectual or dead" (James 2:17,26) and "useless or empty" (James 2:20). It is living a confused existence of hypocrisy and contradiction (James 2:19). A person who claims faith but does not show that faith through "good works" either has made a false claim and has never been saved or may severely handicap themselves from the full experience of a life of vibrant faith. A believer with no "good works" may be saved but may lose many of the eternal rewards granted to those who are faithful doers of "good works" (1 Cor. 3:13-15). A duck who refuses to paddle does not cease to be a duck. But he most likely will not enjoy the life for which he was made.

James 2:14-26 makes more sense if one can grasp the perspective in which James frames his discussion of faith. Repeatedly James challenges his readers to "see" or "show" faith through what is done. We are saved or justified by God alone by grace through faith. God is the ultimate arbiter of justification, and he alone will judge who has expressed genuine faith in him. We cannot "see" this divine aspect of salvation. The only way we as humans can "see" salvation or righteousness in others is when they exhibit or "evidence" such faith-based justification through "good works." James 2:24 makes it clear that people "see" others' righteous faith only by what they do. We as humans cannot see faith like God can. We can only see "good works" as evidence of faith. This realization should spur us on to more acts of service personally. Pauline treatment of justification tends to be from God's perspective. James' treatment of justification describes what we as humans can see.

We would also do well to realize that even as we look for "good works" from others, we should look with a lot of grace. James cites two examples of faith, Abraham and Rahab. One lied about his wife, had a child with someone not his wife. The other lived among idol worshippers, was morally suspect and may have lied to save her own skin. Yet these two are described as being "counted as righteous" as they demonstrated their faith through acts of obedience and courage. If Abraham and Rahab were considered righteous by God and demonstrated this righteousness through displays of faith, we can be encouraged and follow suit.

Word Studies/Notes

v.14 *faith* “The claim to faith is not the same as faith. The article before the second occurrence of ‘faith’ probably is an article of previous reference. It cannot mean ‘Can the [Christian] faith save him,’ nor is it likely to be an abstraction (“Can faith abstractly considered save him”); instead, it is referring to the specific kind of ‘faith’ of the person who claims to believe in God but has no commensurate deeds. James, in other words, is asking, ‘Can that [inactive] kind of faith save him?’ James does not at all reject the notion of ‘saving faith,’ for in 5:15 he avers that the prayer of faith saves the ill person, a saving that includes forgiveness of sin” (Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 155).

v. 14 *save* “The context, with its focus on ultimate judgment (vv. 12–13) and justification (vv. 22–25), makes clear that the word has its normal New Testament spiritual meaning here. Sometimes save describes the initial entrance of a person into God’s kingdom (‘conversion’), but it often denotes the final deliverance from sin, death and judgment in the last day. This is the meaning the word seems to have in James (cf. 1:21; 4:12; 5:20), and it makes good sense here, since verse 13 has spoken of the final judgment.” (Moo, 135). Others suggest that “save” does not relate to eternal salvation but to the saving of physical life or a physical lifetime on earth (see Thomas Constable, *Notes on James*, planobible-chapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/james.pdf, 51 or Zane Hodges, *Dead Faith: What Is It?*, 15).

v. 17 *faith by itself* The vain boast, faith by itself, or faith in and of itself with no evidence of action, is dead. Workless faith is worthless faith; it is unproductive, sterile, barren, dead! Great claims may be made about a corpse that is supposed to have come to life, but if it does not move, if there are no vital signs, no heartbeat, no perceptible pulse, it is still dead. The false claims are silenced by the evidence” (Blue, 825).

v. 17 *dead* “James goes on to say that faith without deeds is dead (*nekra*). By this he means, of course, that such a faith fails to accomplish the aim of true faith. That kind of faith may have a type of power, but it is not the power proper to faith. As Ropes notes, the contrast is not so much between faith and deeds (although this stands in the background) but between dead, useless faith and living faith. Faith alone without works is as dead as a body without breath. Deeds are not something extra to be added to faith; they are a necessary constituent part of faith. Without deeds faith is not really true faith—it is only a shadow, a shade, an impostor of true faith” (David P. Nystrom, *James*, The NIV Application Commentary, 149).

v. 18 *deeds* “The works James requires are not done apart from faith but done in faith, not done instead of faith but done because of faith. Faith is the underlying stance of Christian life; deeds are the way of life; becoming mature and complete is the goal of Christian life. James cannot be charged with opposing deeds to faith, since he does not say, ‘I will show you deeds instead of faith.’ Rather, he contends for a showing of both faith and deeds: I will show you my faith by what I do. He does not object to faith; he objects only to faith not accompanied by action. Simply stated, he wants Christians to have faith that works. ... Though he uses the same term for deeds (*erga*) as Paul does in Galatians and Romans, James is not writing in the same context. It is not just that Paul and James discuss different times in the Christian life; they are addressing different issues at any stage in a Christian’s life. Paul uses the term to refer to works of the law (not only rituals but any act of obedience to God’s commands), intended as a basis for standing as righteous before God. In that context, such works are a false alternative to faith in which one would rely on one’s own works instead of relying (by faith) on God’s redemptive works. James is referring to moral actions flowing naturally from genuine faith, so that the faith and deeds are not a dichotomy but a unity” (George M Stulac, *James*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, 107, 111).

v. 19 *believe* “Probably the central defining teaching of both Judaism and Christianity in the context of the Greco-Roman world was the doctrine that there is only one true God. For Jews it was encapsulated in the *Shema*, found in Deut. 6:4 ... This, of course, is not a distinctively Christian doctrine, since non-Christian Jews and even some Gentiles accepted it, but nevertheless it is a commendable belief so far as it goes: ‘That is good,’ says James (literally ‘You do well,’ which might be mildly ironic [cf. 2:8]). But the specific doctrine in question is not the main issue; rather, it is that bare knowledge of theological truth is something that even demons share, but it hardly benefits them. Believing that there is one God (intellectual acknowledgment) is different from believing in (*eiς, eis, into*) the God who is one” (McCartney, 160).

v. 21 *righteous* “If, as we have argued, this verb is to be taken in v. 21 in its demonstrative rather than declarative sense, then in James the accent would fall upon the probative [something that tends to demonstrate or prove something] character of good works, whereas in the Pauline polemic the accent falls without question upon the judicially constitutive and declarative. Whereas Paul is concerned with justification (Rom. 4:3,9), James (2 :21) ‘is concerned with the fruits of justification, the evidence that justification has taken place” (Ronald Y. K. Fung, “‘Justification’ in the Epistle of James,” in *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson, 161).

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APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

God alone can completely examine our faith and offer us his righteousness through faith in him alone; we as people can only see the faith of others through their good works. Do good for others not to receive salvation but because you have already received God's gift of salvation.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

One Long before that famous movie with the “cup song” came out in 2012, Rich Mullins and his Ragamuffin Band added the cup routine (developed in 1931 by The Carter Family) as rhythmic accompaniment to their a capella performance of the song, “Screen Door.” It’s an old song with lyrics you may remember hearing: “Faith without works is like a song you can’t sing. It’s about as useless as a screen door on a submarine.” (Side note – our kids are really missing out on some solid 90’s Christian music; please play some Rich Mullins or Caedmon’s Call for them today.) I remember hearing “Screen Door” early in my faith, and the catchy tune has stuck with me. Most of our preschool and elementary parenting surrounds a child’s “works.” Are they obeying authority figures? Are they following the royal rule of loving others by demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit? How are they acting at school or on the field? Often, we consider our greatest parenting task to be behavior modification. We need to fix that lazy attitude or mean spirit. Unfortunately, when we’re only focused on our child’s behavior, we gloss over and miss the heart of the matter. It’s useless to correct behavior if we aren’t going to look at the heart. We should want our kids to show patience because their heart is tender toward others. We should want our kids to practice kindness as an overflow of what’s in their heart. This week, rather than correct behavior, go deeper and consider the heart. Ask genuine questions about motive and don’t forget to pray with them. We’re praying for you!).

What Does The Bible Say?	What Do You Think?	What Do You Do?
Read James 2:14-26 1. How does James describe faith without action in verse 17? 2. What will James use to demonstrate his faith? 3. What did Abraham’s actions do to his faith?	What’s the difference between working for and working out your faith?	Put your faith in action this week by loving your neighbor. Think of something to show love to a neighbor (take dinner, bring in their recycling, visit with an elderly person) and do it!

CORE COMPETENCY: Salvation by Grace

I believe that I become a child of God through faith in Jesus, not because of anything I do.

MEMORY VERSE: Joshua 1:9

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.


Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

_____ I completed my Bible Study

_____ I memorized this week’s verse

_____ I brought my Bible to church

_____ I brought a friend



CHILD’S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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BIBLE CHURCH**

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