

## James 2:14-26 - Living Faith (9 August 2020)

BDAG: ὄφελος

**an advantage derived from someth., benefit, good** τί τὸ ὄφ.; *what good does it do?* **Js 2:16** (Hierocles 14, 451; Philo, Migr. Abr. 55 and Just., D. 14, 1 τί γὰρ ὄφ.); W. ἐάν foll. (cp. Ael. Aristid. 53 p. 640 D.; M. I. Brutus, Ep. 4) vs. **14**; 2 Cl 6:2 (a saying of Jesus; in **Mt 16:26** τί ὠφεληθήσεται ἄνθρωπος, ἐὰν ... ); τί μοι τὸ ὄφ.; *what good is it to me?* **1 Cor 15:32**. τί μοι ὄφελος ταῦτα ἑωρακότι καὶ μὴ γινώσκοντι ... ; *how does it benefit me to have seen this and not to understand ... ?* Hv 3, 3, 1 (τί μοι ὄφελος; Chariton 7, 4, 10).—DELG s.v. 2 ὀφέλλω. M-M.

Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

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BDAG: ὑπάρχω

**1** **to really be there, exist, be present, be at one's disposal** (Pind., Aeschyl., Hdt.+) μηδενὸς αἰτίου ὑπάρχοντος *since there is no good reason* **Ac 19:40**. Cp. **27:21**; **28:18**; *be somewhere* **4:34**; **10:12**; **17:27**; **Phil 3:20**; 1 Cl 61:2; EpilMosq 3 (TestAbr A p. 5, 23 [Stone p. 12] ἐν τῇ σκηνῇ; Just., A I, 29, 1 ἐν σώματι). ἀκούω σχίσματα ἐν ὑμῖν ὑπάρχειν *I hear that there are actually divisions among you* **1 Co 11:18**. εἷς Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἄλλος οὐκ ὑπάρχει *there is only one Christ Jesus and no other* AcPl Ha 1, 18. σιγῆς ὑπαρχούσης 7, 25 (s. σιγή). W. dat. of pers. ὑπάρχει μοί τι *someth. is at my disposal, I have someth.* (X., An. 2, 2, 11; PMagd 9, 2 [III B.C.] ὑπάρχει ἐμοὶ Ἰσιεῖον; Sir 20:16; Jos., Ant. 7, 148) χρυσίον οὐχ ὑπάρχει μοι **Ac 3:6**. Cp. **4:37**; **28:7**; **2 Pt 1:8**. τὰ ὑπάρχοντά τινι *what belongs to someone, someone's property, possessions, means* (SIG 646, 25 [170 B.C.]; very oft. in pap since PHib 94, 2; 15; 95, 12 [III B.C.]; Tob 4:7; TestAbr A 8 p. 86, 7 [Stone p. 20]; Jos., Ant. 4, 261) **Lk 8:3**; **12:15**; **Ac 4:32**. Subst. in the same sense τὰ ὑπάρχοντά τινος (SIG 611, 14; very oft. in pap since PHib 32, 5; 84, 9; PEleph 2, 3 [III B.C.]; Gen 31:18; Sir 41:1; Tob 1:20 BA; TestAbr A 4 p. 81, 28 [Stone p. 10]) **Mt 19:21**; **24:47**; **25:14**; **Lk 11:21**; **12:33, 44**; **14:33**; **16:1**; **19:8**; **1 Cor 13:3**; **Hb 10:34**.

**2** **to be in a state or circumstance, be** as a widely used substitute in H. Gk. for εἶναι, but in some of the foll. pass. the sense 'be inherently (so)' or 'be really' cannot be excluded (s. 1; cp. IG XIV, 2014, 3 ἄνθρωπος ὑπάρχων='being mortal') (B-D-F §414, 1; s. Rob. 1121) w. a predicate noun

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BDAG: φρίσσω

**φρίσσω** 1 aor. ἔφριξα; pf. ptc. πεφρικώς (Hom. et al.; LXX; Joseph. [-ττ-]; TestSol 2:1; TestAbr [-ττ-]; ApcEsd 7:7 p. 32, 19 Tdf. [θεός], ὃν πάντα φρίσσει; Just.) **to tremble fr. fear, shudder** (fr. φρίξ 'quivering, shuddering'; Hom. et al., w. acc. of pers. or thing that causes the fear), abs. (Da 7:15 Theod.; Philo, Det. Pot. Ins. 140) ὄλος ἡμην πεφρικώς Hn 1, 2, 1. Of hostile spirits (who shudder at exorcism: PGM 3, 227; 4, 2541f δαίμονες φρίσσουσί σε; 2829; 12, 118; Orph. Fgm. in Clem. Alex., Strom. 5, 125, 1; AcPh 132 [Aa II/2, 63, 12] φρίττοντες; Just., D. 49, 8; Ps.-Clem., Hom. 5, 5.—Of entities in general: Prayer of Manasseh [=Odes 12] 4; TestAbr A 9 p. 86, 30 [Stone p. 20]; 16 p. 96, 22f [St. p. 40]. On this subj. s. the commentaries w. further exx. [without the verb φρίσσω], esp. Dibelius, ad loc.; EPeterson, Εἷς Θεός 1926, 295–99.—Reff. and lit. on ὄνομα φρικτόν in SEitrem, Pap. Osloenses I 1925, 98) **Js 2:19**. In imagery of the earth B 11:2 (Jer 2:12).—DELG s.v. φρίξ. M-M.

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BDAG: κενός

**κενός, ἢ, ὄν** (Hom.+)  
gener. 'empty'

**1** pert. to being without someth. material, **empty** (TestJob 10:4; GrBar 12:6; Jos., Vi. 167) κεράμιον *empty jar* Hm 11:15. σκεῦος (4 Km 4:3) m 11:13. κ. ἀποστέλλειν τινά *send someone away empty-handed* (cp. PRein 55, 9 [III A.D.] μὴ ἀναπέμψης αὐτὸν κενόν; Gen 31:42; Dt 15:13; Job 22:9) **Mk 12:3**; cp. **Lk 1:53; 20:10f.**

**2** pert. to being devoid of intellectual, moral, or spiritual value, **empty** fig. extension of mng. 1

ⓐ of things: *without content, without any basis, without truth, without power* κ. λόγοι *empty words* (Pla., Laches 196b; Menand., Mon. 512 [752 J.] Mei.; Herm. Wr. 16, 2; Ex 5:9; Dt 32:47; Jos., C. Ap. 2, 225; TestNapht 3:1.—PParis 15, 68 [120 B.C.] φάσει κενῆ) **1 Cor 3:18 D; Eph 5:6**; Dg 8:2; AcPl Ox 6, 13 (cp. Aa I 241, 14); cp. D 2:5. πνεῦμα Hm 11:11, 17. κ. ἀπάτη *empty deceit* **Col 2:8** (cp. Arrian, Anab. 5, 10, 4 κενὸς φόβος=false alarm). Of the things of everyday life *vain* Hm 5, 2, 2. τρυφή 12, 2, 1. πεποίθησις Hs 9, 22, 3. Of preaching and faith **1**

**Cor 15:14ab** (cp. the theme of 'empty hope' Reader, Polemo p. 313); **Js 2:20** P<sup>74</sup> (cp. Demosth. 18, 150 κ. πρόφασις; Aeschyl., Pers. 804 κ. ἔλπις; cp. Wsd 3:11; Sir 34:1). As κ. =μάταιος (**1 Cor 15:17**), the two words are found together in the same sense (cp. Demosth. 2, 12; Plut., Artox. 1018 [15, 6], Mor. 1117a; Oenomaus in Eus., PE 5, 21, 5 κενὰ καὶ μάταια of oracles; Hos 12:2; Job 20:18; EpArist 205) 1 Cl 7:2; cp. κενὴ ματαιολογία Pol 2:1.

ⓑ of pers. (Pind. et al.; Soph., Ant. 709; Plut., Mor. 541a ἀνόητοι καὶ κενοί; Epict. 2, 19, 8; 4, 4, 35; Judg 9:4; 11:3 B; Philo, Spec. Leg. 1, 311; Just., D. 64, 2 οἱ προφῆται οἱ κενοί): *foolish, senseless, empty* Hm 12, 4, 5. οἱ προφῆται οἱ κενοί 11:15. ἄνθρωπος κ. **Js 2:20**; Pol 6:3; τῶν δούλων τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν κ. Hs 6, 2, 1. ἄνθρωπος κενὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ δικαίου *empty of the upright spirit* Hm 5, 2, 7. κ. ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας 11:4; ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως κ. Hs 9, 19, 2 (cp. κενοὶ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἀγάπης Iren. 4, 33, 7 [Harv. II 261, 2]). In paronomasia (cp. Job 27:12) αὐτὸς κ. ὢν κενὰς καὶ ἀποκρίνεται κενοῖς *he himself, empty (of God's Spirit) as he is, gives empty answers to empty people* m 11:3.—Vs. 13.

**3** **pert. to being without purpose or result, in vain** κενὰ μελετᾶν *imagine vain things* **Ac 4:25** (Ps 2:1). κενὸν γενέσθαι *be in vain*: ἡ χάρις αὐτοῦ οὐ κενὴ ἐγενήθη **1 Cor 15:10**. ἡ εἴσοδος ἡμῶν ἢ πρὸς ὑμᾶς οὐ κ. γέγονεν **1 Th 2:1**. κόπος **1 Cor 15:58**.—εἰς κενόν *in vain, to no purpose* (Diod S 19, 9, 5; Heliod. 10, 30; PPetr II, 37, 1b recto, 12 [III B.C.]; Kaibel 646, 10; Lev 26:20; Is 29:8; 65:23; Jer 6:29; TestJob 24:2 [εἰς τὸ κ. codd., S. and V. with Job 2:9f]; Jos., Ant. 19, 27; 96) **2 Cor 6:1**. εἰς κ. τρέχειν *run in vain* (cp. Menand., Mon. 51 Mei. ἀνήρ ἄβουλος εἰς κ. μοχθεῖ τρέχων) **Gal 2:2**; **Phil 2:16a**, echoed in Pol 9:2; cp. **Phil 2:16b**; **1 Th 3:5**.—B. 932. DELG. M-M. EDNT. TW. Spicq. Sv.

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BDAG: δικαίω

β. of God *be found in the right, be free of charges* (cp. TestAbr A 13 p. 93, 14 [Stone p. 34] 'be vindicated' in a trial by fire) **Mt 12:37** (opp. καταδικάζειν). δεδικαιωμένος **Lk 18:14**; GJs 5:1; δεδικαιωμένη (Salome) 20:4 (not pap). **Ac 13:39** (but s. 3 below); **Rv 22:11 v.l.**; Dg 5:14.—Paul, who has influenced later wr. (cp. Iren. 3, 18, 7 [Harv. II 102, 2f]), uses the word almost exclusively of God's judgment. As affirmative verdict **Ro 2:13**. Esp. of pers. δικαιοῦσθαι *be acquitted, be pronounced and treated as righteous* and thereby become δίκαιος, receive the divine gift of δικαιοσύνη through faith in Christ Jesus and

apart from νόμος as a basis for evaluation (MSeifrid, *Justification by Faith—The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* '92) **3:20** (Ps 142:2), **24, 28; 4:2; 5:1, 9; 1 Cor 4:4; Gal 2:16f** (Ps 142:2); **3:11, 24; 5:4; Tit 3:7; Phil 3:12** v.l.; B 4:10; 15:7; IPhld 8:2; Dg 9:4; (w. ἀγιάζεσθαι) Hv 3, 9, 1. οὐ παρὰ τοῦτο δεδικαίωμα *I am not justified by this* (after **1 Cor 4:4**) IRo 5:1. ἵνα δικαιωθῇ σου ἡ σάρξ *that your flesh* (as the sinful part) *may be acquitted* Hs 5, 7, 1; δ. ἔργοις *by* (on the basis of) *works, by what one does* 1 Cl 30:3; cp. **Js 2:21, 24f** (ἔργον 1a and πίστις 2dδ); δι' ἑαυτῶν δ. *by oneself*=as a result of one's own accomplishments 1 Cl 32:4. (cp. κατὰ νόμον Hippol., Ref. 7, 34, 1).—Since Paul views God's justifying action in close connection with the power of Christ's resurrection, there is sometimes no clear distinction between the justifying action of acquittal and the gift of new life through the Holy Spirit as God's activity in promoting uprightness in believers. Passages of this nature include **Ro 3:26, 30; 4:5** (on δικαιοῦν τὸν ἀσεβῆ cp. the warning against accepting δῶρα to arrange acquittal Ex 23:7 and Is 5:23; δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν **Ro 3:24** is therefore all the more pointed); **8:30, 33** (Is 50:8); **Gal 3:8**; Dg 9:5. For the view (held since Chrysostom) that δ. in these and other pass. means 'make upright' s. Goodsp., Probs. 143–46, JBL 73, '54, 86–91.

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BDAG: τελειόω

**1** **to complete an activity, complete, bring to an end, finish, accomplish** (Dionys. Hal. 3, 69, 2 τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τὰ πολλὰ εἰργάσατο, οὐ μὴν ἔτελείωσε τὸ ἔργον; Polyb. 8, 36, 2; 2 Ch 8:16; 2 Esdr 16: 3, 16) τὸ ἔργον **J 4:34; 17:4; pl. 5:36**. πάντα 1 Cl 33:6. ὡς τελειώσω τὸν δρόμον μου καὶ τὴν διακονίαν **Ac 20:24**. ἀγνῶς τελειοῦν τὴν διακονίαν *complete service as deacon in holiness* Hs 9, 26, 2. τὰς ἡμέρας *spend all the days* of the festival **Lk 2:43** (cp. Jos., Ant. 3, 201). Pass. ἵνα τελιωθῇ ἡ γραφή *in order that the scripture might receive its final fulfillment* **J 19:28** (perh. this belongs to 2c.)—τελειῶσαί τινα *allow someone to reach the person's goal* (Hdt. 3, 86) pass. τῇ τρίτῃ τελειοῦμαι *on the third day I will reach my goal* **Lk 13:32** (hardly mid., 'bring to a close' [Iambl., Vi. Pyth. 158] w. 'my work' to be supplied. But s. 2d below and cp. JDerrett, ZNW 75, '84, 36–43 [wordplay involving death]).—This may also be the place for **Hb 7:19** (s. 2eα below); **11:40** (s. 2d below).

**2** **to overcome or supplant an imperfect state of things by one that is free**

**fr. objection, bring to an end, bring to its goal/accomplishment**

Ⓐ of Jesus ἔπρεπεν αὐτῷ (i.e. τῷ θεῷ) διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι (Ἰησοῦν) **Hb 2:10** (i.e., as the context indicates, he receives highest honors via suffering and death in his identification w. humanity); pass., **5:9; 7:28**. This is usu. understood to mean the **completion** and **perfection** of Jesus by the overcoming of earthly limitations (s. Windisch, Hdb. exc. on **Hb 5:9**.—JKögel, Der Begriff τελειοῦν im Hb: MKähler Festschr. 1905, 35–68; OMichel, D. Lehre von d. christl. Vollkommenheit nach d. Anschauung des Hb: StKr 106, '35, 333–55; FTorm, Om τελειοῦν i Hb: Sv. Ex. Årsb. 5, '40, 116–25; OMoe, TZ 5, '49, 165ff). S. 3 below.

Ⓑ **bring to full measure, fill the measure of** τὶ someth. τὰς ἀποκαλύψεις καὶ τὰ ὄραματα Hn 4, 1, 3. ἐτελείωσαν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῶν τὰ ἀμαρτήματα GPt 5:17 (κατά A 2by).

Ⓒ **fulfill** of prophecies, promises, etc., which arouse expectation of events or happenings that correspond to their wording (τελείωσις 2.—Jos., Ant. 15, 4 θεοῦ τοὺς λόγους τελειώσαντος; Artem. 4, 47 p. 228, 19 ἐλπίδας) ἢ πίστις πάντα ἐπαγγέλλεται, πάντα τελειοῖ Hm 9:10; pass. *be fulfilled* ἐξαίφνης τελειωθήσεται τὸ βούλημα αὐτοῦ 1 Cl 23:5.—MPol 16:2ab. The promises of the prophets find their fulfillment, by implication, in the gospel ISm 7:2. This may be the place for **J 19:28** (so Bultmann.—S. 1 above).

Ⓓ of the **perfection** of upright pers. who have gone on before, pass. (Wsd 4:13; Philo, Leg. All. 3, 74 ὅταν τελειωθῆς καὶ βραβείων καὶ στεφάνων ἀξιωθῆς) πνεύματα δικαίων τετελειωμένων **Hb 12:23**. So perh. also **11:40** and **Lk 13:32** (s. 1 above).

Ⓔ **make perfect**

α. *someone* ὁ νόμος οὐδέποτε δύναται τοὺς προσερχομένους τελειῶσαι **Hb 10:1**; likew. perh. (s. 1 above) **7:19** (then οὐδέν would refer to humanity). κατὰ συνείδησιν τελειῶσαι τὸν λατρεύοντα **9:9**. Perh. **10:14** (s. 3 below). Pass. in act. sense *become perfect* (Zosimus: Hermet. IV p. 111, 15f) D 16:2; ἔν τινι in someth. (Jos., Ant. 16, 6) ἐν (τῇ) ἀγάπῃ **1J 4:18**; 1 Cl 49:5; 50:3. W. inf. foll. B 6:19. ἵνα ὧσιν τετελειωμένοι εἰς ἓν *in order that they might attain perfect unity* **J 17:23**.—Also in an unfavorable sense τελειωθῆναι τοῖς ἀμαρτήμασιν B 14:5.—For **Phil 3:12** s. 3 below.

β. *someth.* The Lord is called upon, in the interest of his community τελειῶσαι αὐτήν ἐν τῇ ἀγάπῃ σου D 10:5. Pass. (Philo, Somn. 1, 131 ψυχὴ τελειωθεῖσα ἐν ἄθλοισ ἀρετῶν) ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἢ πίστις ἐτελειώθη *faith was perfected in good deeds* **Js 2:22**. Of love **1J 2:5; 4:12, 17**. Cp. **2 Cor 12:9** v.l.

❸ As a term of mystery religions **consecrate, initiate**, pass. *be consecrated*,

become a τέλειος (s. τέλειος 3) **Phil 3:12** (though mng. 2α is also prob.). Some of the Hb-passages (s. 2α; εα above) may belong here, esp. those in which a *consecration* of Jesus is mentioned **2:10; 5:9; 7:28** (s. THaering, Monatschr. für Pastoraltheol. 17, 1921, 264–75. Against him ERiggenbach, NKZ 34, 1923, 184–95 and Haering once more, *ibid.* 386–89.—EKaesemann, D. wand. Gottesvolk '39, 82–90; GAvdBerghvEysinga, De Brief aan de Hebreëen en de oudchristelijke Gnosis: NThT 28, '39, 301–30).—DELG s.v. τέλος. M-M. EDNT. TW.

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CBC Jas, 1,2 Pe, Jud, Rev: Notes

By works Paul means the “works of the law” that had salvific value for many Jews, while James means the good works that are exhibited in the Christian life. There is no true antithesis; Paul and James are not in conflict.

Osborne, Grant R. “James.” In *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, edited by Philip W. Comfort, 58. Cornerstone Biblical Commentary. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011.

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CBC Jas, 1,2 Pe, Jud, Rev: Commentary

As Davids (1982:119) puts it: “A faith which is purely doctrinal and does not result in pious action (i.e., charity) is a dead sham, totally useless for salvation. True faith reveals itself in pious deeds of love, as the examples of Abraham and Rahab show.

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The Greek word for “faith” appears 11 times, and the Greek word for “actions/good deeds” appears 12 times in 2:14–26. Faith means a claim to believe in and follow Christ, and “actions/good deeds” are the deeds done in the name of Christ, acts of mercy meant to help others (1:25, lit., a “doer of works”). This is summed up in 3:13, where wisdom means “living an honorable life, doing

good works." This emphasis on deeds required in the name of faith is found in the prophets (Isa 1:11, 17; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:8), in John the Baptist's preaching (Luke 3:7–14), in Jesus' teaching (Matt 7:15–21; John 15:5, 8, 16), and in Paul (Eph 2:10; cf. Rom 13:3; Gal 6:10; 1 Thess 5:15).

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CBC Jas, 1,2 Pe, Jud, Rev: Commentary

Note the buildup in the passages. In 2:14 faith apart from works has no "good" value or profit; in 2:17 it is "dead and useless"; now in 2:20 it is "unproductive." James uses a beautiful play on words for this. The Greek *argē* [TG692, ZG734] is *a* [TGo1, ZGo1] (the *a*-privative) + *ergon* [TG2041, ZG2240], meaning "without work" or "ineffective, useless" (cf. Matt 20:3, 6 of "idle workers").

One could say it is "worthless because it is work-less." So faith not accompanied by good deeds is unproductive and useless because by nature it fails to "work" at its faith.

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The point is that works are necessary to prove that one's faith is valid, and as Abraham showed, God was testing Abraham to show that his faith was real, and his final verdict will take one's "works" into account (see the note on 2:21 for this meaning as part of "shown to be right"). We are saved by grace through faith not works (cf. Eph 2:8–9), but works are the necessary result of a true faith and prove that the faith is real. Paul actually agrees with this in Ephesians 2:10, when he says those saved by faith were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (TNIV). Without works there is no evidence there was ever a faith to begin with, and that is the thrust in this section.

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neither faith nor works can function properly apart from each other.

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Let me note three areas where the two can be reconciled: (1) Paul is concerned with the issue of regeneration, James with the issue of sanctification; Paul with how a person is saved, James with how a person lives out their salvation. (2) For Paul justification refers to that moment when God declares a person right with him, while for James it refers to God vindicating a person's faith and showing it to be right with him, leading to the final vindication at the Last Judgment. (3) Paul fights against the "works of the law," i.e., following its stipulations as a means of being justified, while James fights for the good works that result from salvation. To put Paul and James together, works cannot bring about justification, but works must result from justification.

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For the fifth and final time James states the thesis of this section (2:26; cf. 2:14, 17, 20, 24), "Faith is dead without good works." Davids (1982:134) calls this "dead orthodoxy" and says it "has absolutely no power to save and may in fact even hinder the person from coming to living faith, a faith enlivened by works of charity (i.e., acts of love and goodness)."

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The Message of James: 9. The Proving of Faith (2:14–26)

Now, what is a Christian's ultimate security in the day of judgment? It is this, that we appear before the judgment-seat as those who are already saved.



When the books are opened, there is also opened the Lamb's book of life and those whose names are recorded there cannot be touched by adverse judgment (Rev. 20:12–15). This great and eternal salvation is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (e.g. Jn. 3:16; Eph. 2:8). How very important, then, it is to know what a true and saving faith is! So much rests on it.

Motyer, J. A. *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985.

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The Message of James: Making Sure about Faith

What makes faith real? Can we be sure that our faith is a saving faith? Faith can be such a vague word. Many people would say: 'Oh, I'm a great believer'—but all it amounts to is a wishful thought that in fact everything turns out for the best and that it will do so if only one believes it! James is far too practical—and far too concerned for us—to leave things like that.

Motyer, J. A. *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith*. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985.

**Note:**

**Clipped:** August 8, 2020

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The idea of 'claim' is important. R. V. G. Tasker is helpful here: James 'does not say "though a man has faith" but "though a man say ...".' James offers something of a definition of the faith which he is examining. It is a mere matter of claim, a formally correct statement, but its doctrinal credibility does not issue in a new direction of life. The question which James therefore asks expects the answer 'no': 'That faith cannot save him, can it?'<sup>1</sup>

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The Message of James: Making Sure about Faith

he approaches them with his challenging question, not because he would propose a different way of salvation, but because he would have them understand what 'by faith alone' really means.

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The Message of James: Making Sure about Faith  
saving faith results in a distinctive life.

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The Message of James: Around the Circumference (2:15–17, 25–26)

In the two A-sections James contrasts the armchair philanthropist of verse 16 with the active and personally risky compassion of Rahab. In each case James is starting at home.

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**Note:**

**Tags:** Jas 2:25–26

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The Message of James: Around the Circumference (2:15–17, 25–26)

Rahab's sort of faith, by contrast, puts all life under contribution: her house, her resources, her ingenuity and her personal safety. This is living faith, *for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead* (26)

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The Message of James: Around the Circumference (2:15–17, 25–26)

We will confuse ourselves in seeking to understand what James means by this comparison if we introduce words describing the relationship between body and spirit: if we say, for example, that the spirit animates the body, and then try to discover how *works* might be thought to animate *faith*. We ought to start rather with the fact that unity of body and spirit is required for life, and so also there must be a unity of faith and works. They must belong together in a living Christian experience.

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The Message of James: Around the Circumference (2:15–17, 25–26)

In every area there is some opportunity to experience the great Christian truth that the abundance of the one is designed for the need of the other (2 Cor. 8:12–15). So much nonsense is talked about the early church of Acts 2–4 as practising an early form of communism. Nothing of the sort! Those who speak like this view it as an experiment which failed and from which, therefore, we can distance ourselves. What we find in Acts 2:44–45 and 4:32–35 was simply an intolerant attitude towards want. Private ownership was neither denied nor even criticized (*e.g.* Acts 5:4), but no piece of private good was held back if by its disposal some need of a brother or sister might be met. That is what James calls a true and living faith.

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The Message of James: The Heart of the Matter (2:18–24)

A. Barnes is frighteningly plain: 'If (demons) might hold such faith and *remain* in perdition, men might hold it and *go* to perdition....'

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The Message of James: The Heart of the Matter (2:18–24)

A faith with no results is a demonic and bare affirmation. Results (*works*) prove the living reality of faith and bring assurance that the believer has entered into the benefits (righteousness, friendship) promised.

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The Message of James: The Heart of the Matter (2:18–24)

He pronounced Abram to be righteous in his sight, on the ground of the faith which he had placed in the divine promises. Yet, in Genesis 22:12, as Abraham stands with the knife upraised, the Lord stops him with the words, '... now I know that you fear God'. But had not the Lord, who knows all things, known that from the start? Here, as so often, the Bible lets us into the mind of God by portraying God as if he were man. It brings divine mysteries down to our level so that we may appreciate truly the meaning and significance of a thing—for if we can see clearly what God thinks about something, then we have come to

real certainty. So then, if God were human, he would register Abram's profession of faith (Gn. 15:6) and would say, 'So far, so good; it all seems correct.' Then he would wait: what will follow?

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The Message of James: The Heart of the Matter (2:18–24)

A true faith produces results, and in particular the result of costly and wholly trustful obedience to the word of God. It fell to James, alone in the New Testament, to bring out this total view of the faith of Abraham.

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The Message of James: The Primary Works

The primary works of faith, then, are the works of Abraham and Rahab and they apply to all without exception.

What was the work of Abraham? He held nothing back from God. God said, 'I want your son' and Abraham 'rose early in the morning' (Gn. 22:3) in prompt obedience. What was the work of Rahab? She reached out and took into her own care those who were needy and helpless, regardless of the cost to herself.

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The Message of James: The Primary Works

It is a life of obedience in particular to *the royal law* (8)—our obedience to the word of God seen in our concern for the needs of man. The life of faith is more than a private (long past) transaction of the heart with God. It is the life of active consecration seen in the obedience which holds nothing back from God, and the concern which holds nothing back from human need.

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