



PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR AN EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN LIFE
Lesson Five: Dead Faith
James 2:14-20

1. How do you define faith? (*Hebrews 11:1*)

2. How would you explain to a child why we do “good works”?

Keys to the Text

James continues his series of tests by which his readers can evaluate whether their faith is living or dead. And he clearly says that a faith that is not acted out is really no faith at all. He's not saying that a person is saved by works (he has already clearly asserted in 1:17-18 that salvation is a gracious gift from God).

He is saying there is a kind of apparent faith that is dead and does not save. It is possible James was speaking to Jewish Christians who had embraced the mistaken notion that since righteous works and obedience to God's law were not efficacious for salvation, they were not necessary at all. Thus they reduced "faith" to a mere mental assent to the facts about Christ. The truth that James emphasizes in this text is that what we do reveals who we are.

James 2:14

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? (*Matthew 7:21-23, 21:28-31*)

James 2:15-16 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 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? (*Matthew 25:31-46*)



James 2:17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James 2:18 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. (*1 Thessalonians 1:3, Hebrews 6:10*)

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! (*Deut. 6:4-5*)

James 2:20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Application Questions:

- What two examples does James cite to show the futility of faith without works (*vv. 15-16, 19*)? How are these good examples of dead faith?
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- If you were tried in a court of law for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? How would you answer this? What undeniable proof of God's saving and sanctifying work do you see in your life?
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- Is James suggesting that helping the poor and hungry is a prerequisite to salvation? How do you know?
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Self-Examination:

- If works and love do not blossom forth, it is not genuine faith, the gospel has not yet gained a foothold, and Christ is not yet rightly known. Has the gospel gained a foothold in your life?
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And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. (Revelation 14:13 KJV)