

TEMPTATION 2: PROFESSING FAITH WITHOUT WORKS OR DEEDS

JAMES 02: 14–26

Introduction

The greatest tragedy of the church today is people who profess Christ and yet do not live for Christ. Millions profess Christ and they are baptized, confirmed and made members of the church, but they do not follow nor live for Christ. They do not live pure and righteous lives, nor do they give all they are and have to reach the lost and needy of the world. Are they saved? Do they have a genuine faith? This is the discussion of this passage. This is the second temptation that is common to all Christian believers: the temptation to profess faith without works or deeds.

- I. Two questions (v.14).
- II. The destitute Christian believer (vv. 15-17).
- III. The two men of arrogance (v. 18).
- IV. The orthodox religionist (vv. 19-20).
- V. The man who proved his faith by works: Abraham (vv. 21-24).
- VI. The woman who proved her faith by works: Rahab (vv. 25-26).

I. James 02:14 Faith without Good Works

There are two questions that every believer needs to ask himself.

=> Can a man have faith and not do good works?

=> Can faith without good works save a man?

Every thinking person who is honest knows that the answer to these two questions is an emphatic, “No!” A person who really believes something does something; he acts. Yet this is the *curse* of Christianity and of the church. Millions profess faith in Christ and belong to the church, yet they do not live for Christ. They live for the world and self. They have been baptized and confirmed, joined the church and attend worship services, but they do what they want when they want. They just go on and live like everyone else in the world. The only difference between their lives and unbelievers is that they sometimes get up on Sunday mornings and attend church. There is little if any difference between their behaviour and speech during the week.

James asks a piercing question: “What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” Note two significant facts.

1. The man claims to have faith. But it is *only what he claims*; he does nothing to show that he really believes in Christ. He does not live for Christ; he does not live righteously and godly in this present world, looking for the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. His faith is only a faith of speech, not of behaviour and life. His faith is only a faith of profession, not of possession. His faith is only a false profession. Note verse 17 and you will see what Scripture calls his faith: a *dead faith*.
2. Note that it is called a *dead or useless faith* three times in this passage (Jas. 2:17, 20, 26). The faith of a false profession is...
 - a *dead faith* (Jas. 2:17, 20, 26).
 - a *vain, empty faith* (1 Cor. 15:2).
 - a *wordy faith*
 - a *Christless faith*.
 - a *faith that has no deeds* (Jas. 2:14).
 - a *hollow faith*
 - a *spurious faith*.

The very best description is probably that of Scripture: it is a *dead faith*. It is just a *vain, empty faith, an unprofitable faith* – a faith that profits absolutely nothing. It is not enough to claim that we have faith and not live for Christ. We must believe Christ – really believe – that He is the Saviour and Lord of life. If we really believe, we will do what Christ says. We will live for Christ and do the works or deeds that please Christ. We will live a *Christ-centred life, not a Christless life*. Five examples are given to illustrate the point.

II. *James 02:15–17 The Destitute Christian Believer*

There is the example of a destitute Christian believer. Note how the example really rebukes us, rebukes most believers and most churches throughout the world. And note, the example is dealing with believers, with brothers and sisters in the Lord.

A brother or sister faces some need or problem that makes him or her destitute. They are unable to properly dress themselves, to stay warm, and to secure enough daily food. We see them and share words of comfort with them. We speak peace and sometimes give a few items to help them in their need as they seek to solve their problem for warmth and food.

Now note: most believers and churches go this far. When a brother or sister has need, we visit, comfort and wish them well. But this is not enough. What good is it if we do not *give them the things they need*?

The point is this: faith, if it does not do good works, is dead. True faith loves and cares and is compassionate and reaches out to help the needy. A person can talk about believing in Jesus Christ until he repeatedly, but if he is not reaching out and helping the destitute of the world just like Jesus did, his faith is dead — utterly meaningless. No person really believes in Jesus Christ unless he is following Jesus Christ and doing the works of love and righteousness which Christ did. True faith is an operative faith, a faith that really works. Therefore, if we really believe in Christ, we will follow Christ: we will take all that *we are and have* beyond our own needs and give it to meet the needs of destitute brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Mat 19:21-22 Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Mat 10:28 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Mat 25:41-46 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Luke 9:23 Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

Luke 14: 23 “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.’”

Luke 14:26, 27 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Acts 9:36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.

1 Tim 6:17-18 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

Heb 13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

III. *James 02:18 Two Men of Arrogance*

There is the example of two men of arrogance. James is painting the picture of two men, but only one man speaks and what he says is only one sentence. The man says to another imaginary man: “You have faith; I have deeds.” The picture is that of two arrogant men.

=> The imaginary man has faith. He believes that he is saved by faith — that God accepts him because he believes in Jesus Christ even if he fails to live for Christ. Once he has believed in Christ — professed and been baptized and joined the church — God has accepted him and will take him to heaven when he dies.

Mat 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Mark 7:6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

Titus 1:16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

=> The imaginary speaker claims to have works or deeds — that God accepts him because he does good works and lives as good a life as he can. He believes that the important thing to God is to be religious and do all the good that a person can. If a person does this, God will never reject him; God will accept him no matter who he is and no matter what religion he follows.

Mat 7:22 “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’”

Note that James pulls no punches: it is not a matter of faith or works. To say and profess faith alone will not save a person, and to follow works to become acceptable to God will not save a person. James handles both men of arrogance

with one clear statement: “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith *by my works*,” by “*what I do*.”

A person who truly believes in Christ works for Christ. He follows and lives for Christ. A person who only professes Christ lives for himself, going about doing what he wants when he wants. He does not live a life of separation from the world, a life of righteousness and purity, nor does he give all he has to meet the desperate needs of this world. He professes Christ, but lives for the pleasure and things of this day and time. He knows nothing of the life of Christ, of the sacrificial giving and living that Christ lived and demands.

Note: one might prefer to look at this verse as a true believer pleading with a man of false faith. The believer says:

=> “You profess to have faith, but where is the proof? True faith must have proof; it must be backed up; you must show and demonstrate that you believe. I have works to back up what I profess. Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith *by my works*. Your faith is not seen; all I have is your word. There is no change in your life. But you can see my faith *what I do*.”

Mat 5:16 *“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

Luke 10:37 *The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”*

John 5:26 *“For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself.”*

James 2:18 *But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*

1 Pet 2:12 *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

Mat 7:21-23 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers!”*

Titus 1:16 *They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.*

Mark 7:6 He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.’”

IV. James 02:19–20 The Orthodox Religionist

There is the example of the orthodox religionists. A true man of religion believes in one God: he is not an atheist nor an agnostic. He is a believer, and note: his belief in God is said to be a good thing. The man does well to believe in God. But believing in God is not enough. There is a *dead belief and a living belief*, a belief that does not lead to salvation and a belief that does lead to salvation.

=> Consider the demons or evil spirits. They believe in God; they even know that God exists. They even believe in the deity of Christ. On one occasion they cried out to Jesus, “What do you want with us Son of God?” (Mt. 8:29). But the demons are not saved. Their belief has not affected their lives and behaviour at all.

Therefore, know this, know exactly what verse 20 says: “You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless.” Do not be vain [empty, useless, foolish], true faith is a living faith, a faith that works, a faith that stirs a person to live for Christ – to live a righteous and pure life and to give all he is and has to reach a lost and desperate world for Christ.

Mat 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Titus 2:11-15 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

Heb 10:23-24 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

James 2:17-18 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

1 Pet 2:11-12 Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

V. **James 02:21–24 Abraham, A Man of Faith**

There is the example of Abraham who proved his faith by his works or deeds. Note exactly what verse 21 says:

James 2:21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?

This is a verse that causes great problems for some people, for it seems to say that when Abraham offered up Isaac in obedience to God's instruction, he was justified. That is, Abraham was justified by works. Do works justify a man? Is that what is meant? No! What James is saying is that Abraham *proved that he was justified; he proved that he was justified by what he did – by his works*. Abraham's faith was *proven to be a true and living faith by his works*. How do we know that this is what James really meant? Because James says so. Note what James says:

=> Abraham's faith worked with, cooperated with his works (v. 22). That is, his faith was acted out and proven by his works.

=> By his works Abraham's faith was made complete (eteleiothe), that is, finished, completed, carried to the end (v. 22). Abraham's faith was proven, shown to be a complete faith. A true and living faith works: it completes and finishes its course. If a faith does not work or act or complete or finish its course, it is a dead faith – an incomplete, unfinished and unproven faith.

=> Abraham's faith fulfilled Scripture. What Scripture? The Scripture that said "Abraham believed God; and it was credited to him as righteousness" (see Gen. 15:6). These words were declared some thirty years before Abraham ever offered up Isaac. God pronounced that Abraham was justified and saved thirty years before this event referred to by James. James plainly declares that when Abraham offered up Isaac he was proving his faith. In fact, there is not a chance that Abraham would have ever offered up Isaac unless he already believed in God. The reason Abraham offered up Isaac was *because he did believe God*. He believed; Therefore, he did what God said. This is true with any person. If a person believes Christ, he does what Christ says; he follows Christ. If a person

does not believe Christ, he does not do what Christ says. He goes about doing his own thing; he does not follow Christ.

Note that Abraham was called “God’s Friend.” This says that Abraham had an intimate relationship with God; he believed God and walked in communion and fellowship with God, following and living for God. The point is clear:

“You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (v. 24).

Faith only is *dead faith*, an inactive and worthless faith. True faith is a living and active faith — a faith that proves itself by living for Christ and working for Christ.

Mat 5:16 *“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”*

Eph 6:7 *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men.*

1 Th 1:3 *We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Heb 12:28 *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.*

Psa 02:11 *Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.*

Deu 10:12 *And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

VI. James 02:25–26 Rahab, A Woman of Faith

There is the example of Rahab, the converted prostitute who proved her faith by works. Why mention Rahab and not end the discussion with Abraham? The point has already been clearly shown in Abraham: a living faith proves itself in works. Why then discuss Rahab the prostitute? Because she was a prostitute, the very lowest of society. Even the lowest person who claims to believe in God must do good works. They must clean up their lives and follow God. Rahab did. When the Jericho soldiers were hunting down the spies for Israel, she hid them. Why would she betray her country and protect the Israelite spies? Because she believed in God and His promises. She said to the spies:

Josh 2:9, 11 *I know that the LORD has given this land [of promise] to you...for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.*

She believed in God, therefore, she acted. She put her faith to work. The conclusion is descriptive:

James 2:26 *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

A body without the spirit or breath is dead. It does not move, act, live or work. It is empty, totally useless and worthless. It is a dead body. So it is with faith: faith without works is dead. It does not move, act, live or work. Faith without works is empty, totally useless and worthless. It does not live for Christ, does not follow Him in righteousness or purity nor work for Him in reaching people and meeting the needs of a destitute world.

Mat 20:28 *“Just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Luke 9:23 *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

John 20:21 *Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

John 21:16 *Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”*

Gal 6:2 *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

Gal 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

1 Tim 6:17-18 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*

James 4:17 *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins. ■*