

3. John Stott writes: *“Christianity... is not in essence a religion at all; it is a gospel, the gospel: good news that God’s grace has turned away his wrath, that God’s son has died our death and borne our judgment, that God has mercy on the undeserving, and that there is nothing left for us to do, or even contribute. Faith’s only function is to receive what grace offers.”*

Q. How does this view of faith support Paul’s view of justification by faith as in Romans 5:1-10?

Q. Does it contradict James’ statement in vs.24? Can these two ideas be reconciled?

## Putting faith into action today

- If living, saving faith is focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ, what does this say about the good deeds and works that one might expect to see as a demonstration of that faith?
- If a person who claims to be a Christian in your congregation appears not to be fruitful—not demonstrating works that befit a Christian—what ought you say or do?
- In what sense might faith and works be spoken of as “two sides of the one coin”?
- What are the risks involved if a church promotes the worthiness of its own good works? How do you regard such risks in the light of Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:14-16

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This study was written by Rev. Steve Webster of St. Michaels Anglican Church North Carlton (Vic. Australia) and may be reproduced for small group Bible studies.



Bible study notes

Study #3

# The letter of James

## Chapter 2:14-26 **TRUE TRUST TESTED**

Consider this testimony...

John Wesley grew up during the 18th Century in the house of a clergyman. He died a man of the same profession. Great though his testimony of faith in Christ was, early on his whole faith was based on a mistaken premise. In his journal on 1/2/1738 he describes all of the wonderful and sacrificial deeds of religion he had done and asks:

*"But does all this make me acceptable to God? Does all I ever did or can know, say, give, do, or suffer, justify me in the sight of God?"* Three months later Wesley had found the key to faith in God & wrote: *"In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and had saved me from the law of sin and death."*

The key to Wesley becoming assured that he was in the right with God was not in feelings, nor was it based on his record of good deeds. Instead, Wesley rejected his previous reliance on self and turned wholly to what Christ alone had done. Christ alone could make him right with God. Wesley went on to become one of the most influential witnesses to the love of God of all time.

In the light of his testimony, what can we make of the letter of James when it states: *"You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."* 2:24

Was James’ teaching at odds with the theology of Paul that speaks of justification by faith? (e.g. Romans 5)  
How are we to understand the place of good works in the Christian life?



# Chapter 2: 14-26:

## What is saving faith?

1. Faith is certainly an essential element in the Christian life. Look up the following texts and summarize what you think “saving faith” might be:
  - a. Hebrews 11:6
  - b. Ephesians 2:8
  - c. 2 Corinthians 5:7
  - d. Romans 14:23
2. It is important to realize that there are different kinds of faith, but only one that is truly "saving faith". Discuss the various kinds of “faith” that you witness in your own life or in the lives of others that might not ultimately give assurance of the salvation God freely offers in Christ. (e.g. faith for safety, faith for healing)
3. In James 2:14-26, there is an emphasis upon true and life-giving faith compared to a dead faith. Beginning with verses 14-17....
4.
  - a **Dead faith** (14-17) This kind of faith:
    - Substitutes words for deeds (consider James' examples). People with this kind of faith:
      - 1) Know the correct vocabulary for prayer and sound doctrine
      - 2) Can even quote the Bible,  
...but their "walk" does not measure up to their "talk"!

Q. What is the difference between intellectual assent to a belief and “believing in” someone or something?

(Note, for example, that the Nicene Creed does not say “I believe that there is a God...” but says, “We believe in God”).

Q. Can this “Dead Faith” put a person in the right with God and bring about their salvation?

Three times in this passage, James gives us the answer:

- James 2:17, 20, 26

- b **Dynamic faith** (20-26) This kind of faith:
  - Comes from hearing and responding to the Word of God. Consider Romans 10:8-17
  - Is open to all people (consider the example of Abraham, the father of the Jewish race, alongside the example of Rahab, a non-Jew)
  - Is living and produces change and godly action (17, 18)
  - Is essential to life, without it we are as good as dead (26)

## The place of faith and works

1. Consider the way Paul speaks about Abraham’s faith compared to James’ example
  - Read and compare Romans 4:1-5 and James 2:21-24. How can we reconcile these views of the place of faith and works?
2. For further investigation of how “living” or “saving” faith is demonstrated by and accompanied by good deeds consider:
  - Ephesians 2:8-10
  - Romans 12:1-21