

3. How do you feel about giving? Is it a painful experience, or are you the cheerful giver Paul talks about in I Corinthians?

4. How often do you study the Bible? Is it something that gets no attention in your life, or are you actively pursuing a greater knowledge of God and his will for your life?

LIVING WITH THE TENSION OF FAITH AND GOOD WORKS

Consider Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 6, verses 1-15.

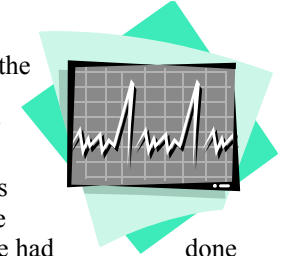
Q. What practical ways can you think of that will help a Christian to guard against using their good works as a matter of show or confidence before God? How can we go about working for God as a product of faith and not endanger our trust in Christ alone?

The letter of James

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

Consider this testimony...

John Wesley of the 18th century grew up in the house of a clergyman and died a man of the same profession. Great though his testimony of faith in Christ may be, early on his whole faith was based on a mistaken premise. In his journal on Feb. 1 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's assurance that he was in the right with God was not in the feelings he felt, nor was it based on his record of good deeds. Instead, Wesley was converted from trusting in what *he* could do, to what *Christ* alone had done for him. He had faith that showed complete reliance on Jesus Christ, and him alone in order to be put in the 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 this testimony, what do 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 Apostle Paul?
How are we to understand the place of good works in the Christian?

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This study was written by Rev. Steve Webster of St. Columb's Anglican Church Hawthorn (Vic. Australia) and may be reproduced for small group Bible studies.

# Chapter 2: 14-26: What is saving faith?

## INTRODUCTION

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.
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....
  - 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”? (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 us in the right with God and bring us 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 Romans 4:1-5 and James 2:21-24

Q. 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
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?

(Reference to the sermon related to this study may help here)

## MAKING SURE YOUR FAITH IS ALIVE, NOT DEAD

If faith is considered as a tree, Paul and James both agree faith in Christ alone for salvation is the ROOT, but James helps us see that true faith is the FRUIT that is produced on the tree of a true faith in Christ.

Q. Is your faith better described as dead or dynamic? Let me give you a couple of ways to check your spiritual vital signs.

1. How do you feel about worship? Is it something that is a priority with you, or is it an insignificant ritual that you just go through because you know you should?
2. What kind of thoughts and goals do you have for life? When you think about the things you would like to do for the next year, 5, 10, are you at the center, or are other people and God in the middle?