

James 2:14-26.

A story was told long ago of geese who gathered together for divine worship. Imagine them meeting every Sunday to listen as an old gander preaches on the glorious destiny of his flock. The geese heard that their creator had made them to fly to distant pastures.

It was an inspirational and moving hour each week. Indeed, flying was a wonderful thought, but rather than spread their wings to fly, the flock would waddle back home week after week. They would sing hymns together, bow and curtsy, and speak with high-sounding words at church. The geese loved to hear a rousing sermon and talk to one another as if they believed it. *As if they believed it?* Yes, because if they truly believed they could fly why did they waddle?

The Domestic Goose by Kierkegaard reminds us that faith isn't a matter of talk but involves action. To say that a bridge can hold you is just words if you never step upon it. Faith goes beyond words—it steps out. To confess that Jesus died for your sins, was raised to life, and will one day return for you is good, but it's just words if Christ has no affect upon your life today.

James' message isn't that faith is perfect or that Christians never waver. His message is that faith shows itself. How we live our lives shows what's truly important to us. It shows what we value, and it indicates whether our faith is more than words.

James 2:14—"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"

What kind of faith saves a man? James has been building up to this question by showing what faith looks like...

How Christian faith responds to trials	James 1:2-12
How Christian faith responds to temptations	James 1:13-18
How Christian faith responds to Scripture	James 1:19-25
How Christian faith responds to others	James 1:27-2:13

Again, this isn't a letter about perfect faith. James goes on to say that "we all stumble in many ways" (Jas 3:2). All of us stumble to the

point that our lives have countless snapshots where our faith didn't look so good. To this, James says that God "gives more grace" (Jas 4:6). So, don't focus upon the snapshots of your best or worst moments in life; zoom out to see the entire motion picture. Does the movie of your life show a faith that has existed only in words or one that's generally lived out in deeds?

WELL WISHING

(JAMES 2:14-17)

James 2:15-16—"If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?"

Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it to Me." Who were Jesus' brothers? All who obeyed Him (Matt 12:50). In context, it's a verse about how Jesus' followers should take care of one another. When a poor believer in Christ comes to church, the church should treat that one as if Christ Himself had come among them.


How Christians treat their own says something about their faith. Jesus warned that turning a brother or sister away is no different than turning Him away. To have numerous chances to help your needy brothers and sisters in Christ and to do nothing for them is a sign that one's faith in Christ may not be real (Matt 25:41). How can you not help a member of your own family if God has adopted you in His?

James is saying much the same as Jesus here. He paints the picture of a brother or sister who's in rags and on the edge of starvation. He or she is rich in Christ, though a beggar in this world just hoping to find help from other believers. And what does this one receive? Not help but words—"Go in peace, be warmed and filled." In other words: *Well, I sure hope you can find someone to help you. Good luck with that!*

What good is sentiment when a man is starving to death and needs real help? Kind words won't keep him alive—and that's James' point. Without any action, faith is no different than sentiment.

A Faith that Works

So, does faith alone really save? Absolutely. Salvation is *sola fide*—sinners are saved through faith alone in Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9). James didn't say otherwise. He only wants us to see that good works are the *result* of true faith...

Faith Alone  Salvation & Good Works

Faith alone saves, but saving faith is never alone. Why was this an issue for James? He was writing to Jewish Christians, believers who had lived under the Law of Moses. They knew it well and had tried to keep its commands. Yet, when they came to Christ, they found freedom. *I'm saved. I can do whatever I want now!* It seems the pendulum had swung from keeping a list of rules to doing nothing much at all.

Some churches wouldn't even lift a finger to help the poor brother or sister in their midst. This is why James wrote: "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas 2:17). In other words, an inactive faith isn't a saving faith.

A FEW MORE CASE STUDIES

(JAMES 2:18-26)

James is filled with case studies. He teaches and then applies, from doctrine to application over and over again throughout his letter. He has taught that faith in Christ shows itself in a person's life. Here are the case studies James used to illustrate the point...

Case #1: Compassion without Action	James 2:15-17
Case #2: Doctrine without Deeds	James 2:18-19
Case #3: Abraham and Isaac	James 2:20-24
Case #4: Rahab and the Spies	James 2:25-26

As compassion without action is dead, so is doctrine without deeds. "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder" (Jas 2:19). That's interesting, isn't it? Only men and women claim to be atheists—fallen angels know better. Without the slightest hint of doubt, they know that God exists... and shudder.

What do the demons believe? James says that they believe the most central tenet of Judaism—God is one (Deut 6:4-6). Their doctrine is correct across the board. In fact, demons believe so sincerely that the thought of God causes them to shudder in terror. Right doctrine matters, but James' point is that saving faith is more than knowledge. It shows itself in acts of service to God.

James 2:21—"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?"

What about Abraham, the revered father of the Jewish people? What did he believe about saving faith? James takes us back to Abraham's near-sacrifice of his only son, Isaac. God had promised Abraham a son, and he waited 25 years before his wife, Sarah, bore him a son. The couple rejoiced, and then the Lord instructed Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice (Gen 22).

Abraham obeyed, knowing that God keeps His promises. Either the Lord would prevent him from taking Isaac's life or Isaac would be raised from the dead (Heb 11:17-19). Abraham believed, and when God tested that belief, it was proven rock solid.

Well, it's easy to read about Abraham's faith and feel discouraged. *He was a great patriarch—who can compare with that?!* This is why James also introduces us to Rahab. She was an obscure Gentile prostitute whose faith was no less real. What did she do?

James 2:25—"And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?"

The Israelites camped near Jericho days before they would destroy the city (Josh 2). They sent two men to spy out Jericho in advance, and the men quickly met Rahab. This isn't surprising as prostitutes went out of their way to welcome visitors. Rahab was no exception.

The story would've been long forgotten if Rahab continued her profession, but she didn't. When the king of Jericho heard spies had entered and stayed with Rahab, she protected them. Why? In her own words, "the Lord your God, He is God" (Josh 2:9-11). She made a profession of faith in Israel's God, and when tested, her faith meant something. She risked her life on the basis of her new faith and was saved from judgment.

We may never be tested like Abraham or Rahab, but when your faith is tested, how do you respond? Hopefully test after test encourages you by revealing that there's something genuine about your faith in Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:6-7).