

## ***“James vs. Paul” – James 2:14-26***

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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take a copy of God’s Word and meet me in James 2...

We have a lot of ground to cover, so I’m going to jump in quick this morning. Recently we have been considering what James teaches about living and dead faith toward the middle of his letter. He offers four illustrations that help us to understand the nature of living (or saving) faith. We’ve looked at three of them so far...

### **The Passive Philanthropist (15-17)** ***Living Faith Is Not Merely Sentimental***

### **The Doctrinal Demon (18-19)** ***Living Faith Is Not Merely Credal***

### **The Caring Canaanite (25-26)** ***Living Faith Is Markedly Hospitable***

So what remains for us to consider are verses 20 to 24, where we see James’ third illustration (and fourth for us to consider), namely...

### **The Premier Patriarch (20-24)** ***Living Faith Is Markedly Loyal***

The “Patriarch” in question is none other than Abraham. And by “loyal” I mean obedient to God and thus characterized by God-honoring works. Living faith is marked by works of obedience.

This is, without a doubt, the most controversial and challenging section in the chapter, if not the whole book. But we have spent a lot of time laying the groundwork for understanding it properly. So let’s do the most important thing and look at the text. What I am about to read to you is the Word of God. Focus your minds and follow along, beginning in verse 20. This is God’s Word...

*“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” (James 2:20-24)*

The rhetorical question of verse 20 sets the stage for what our author is trying to demonstrate—*“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?”*<sup>1</sup> That’s what he intends to show us: *“faith apart from works is useless”*. And by the time we hit verse 24, he believes that he has done just that so he states, *“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”* And this is why this section presents

such a problem for interpreters. It seems to arrive at a different conclusion than the rest of the New Testament, and especially Paul, who says, for example, in Romans 3:28...

*“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.” (Romans 3:28)*

Martin Luther, the catalyst of the Protestant Reformation, was quite troubled by this apparent tension between James and Paul. He made some famous and regrettable statements about the Epistle of James as a result, including his famous “epistle of straw” designation. He even said that if anyone was capable of reconciling James and Paul on this matter, he would gladly give them his own doctorate!<sup>2</sup> Man, I wish someone would have made me that offer when I started my PhD. It would have saved me a lot of time, stress, and money.

Complicating the matter still further, both Paul and James appeal to the same Old Testament figure, Abraham, to prove their case. And you could make an argument that these two verses—James 2:24 and Romans 3:28—are fitting summaries of the overall theological argument being made in their respective epistles.<sup>3</sup> So these are not just offhand comments. These are at the heart of what each author is trying to get across to his readers. And they are both quite emphatic. So who is right? Are we justified by what we do or are we justified by faith alone? Could there be any more important matter to settle? This isn’t a debate over the color of Adam’s hair or the name of Jesus’ great-uncle. “This is about how we are justified—how we are put right with God. Disagreeing over this is disagreeing over what Christianity is really about.”<sup>4</sup>

So how are we to make sense out all of this? Well, as usual, context is what is going to help us out here. It just won’t do to simply string together isolated verses and claim that they are irreconcilable. What we should do instead is give some thought to those verses in context and see if anything can be discerned to help harmonize James and Paul. And, as it turns out, a careful examination does just that. It shows that not only do James and Paul not contradict one another, they actually teach the same thing, the same Gospel.

In order to see this, there are two things in particular that we need to compare. We need to compare, first, how James uses certain language in contrast to other writers in the New Testament and, second, how James draws on the life of Abraham in contrast to Paul in particular.

Let’s start with the first of these matters. I think we all will concede that different people can use the same language to mean different things. Here’s an example. Imagine if someone comes up to me and says, “Hey Brandon, you want to play some football with us?” That could mean two *very* different things depending on who is asking the question. If my good buddy Eric, a pastor of a church plant we were a part of up in Chicago, asks me the question, then I know he’s talking about what I grew up calling “soccer” and, if I say “yes” to that invitation, I am going to be the laughing stock of the field and really sore in the morning because Eric used to play for the national team in Ghana. Same goes if that question comes Arno, another man who attended our last church, since he used to play for the German national team. I’m going to go ahead and politely decline because I don’t need that kind of embarrassment in my life. If, on the other hand, my son asks me to play some football, it’s a pretty safe assumption that what he has in mind involves throwing a pigskin and I’m not going to have to kick anything.

“The big football game” to most Americans is going to make them think about what is happening tonight—Super Bowl LV (55). But you use that language virtually anywhere else in the world and they’re going to think you mean the FIFA World Cup next year in Qatar. So I need to know something about the person I am speaking with in order to understand what he or she means by the term “football.”

Something similar is in play when we compare, for example, James 2 and Romans 3. “Understanding what James and Paul are saying is contingent on understanding how they are using certain words.”<sup>5</sup> Now, we have already considered this as it relates to the language of “faith.” Remember James 2:19? It suggested that demons have a kind of faith, but it’s not saving faith. It’s faith in the sense that they know accurate truths about God and they believe them to be true. That could be said of a lot of people today in churches across the world. But that’s

not saving faith. Saving faith, you'll remember, involves those elements, but it includes the dimension of trust. You don't have saving faith unless you are trusting in the person and work of Christ alone as the sole basis of your salvation. So we have seen that when someone talks about "faith" that doesn't mean they have in mind the kind of faith that saves. The word has a range of meanings. And sometimes Paul uses the term "faith" to mean something different than what James means by the word.<sup>6</sup> Check out the sermon on verse 19 if you want to explore this further.<sup>7</sup>

Today, I want us to turn our attention to the language of "justification" that James uses in places like verses 21 and 24. This language is common in the New Testament, but when you dig deep you discover that the language of justification is used in two different ways. The "primary" way is what most people mean in theology when they speak of "justification." It's the legal sense that we have been considering in this "Justification" series. In this sense, the biblical writer, as David Wells explains,

"...sets up a parallel between the law courts we know in our earthly life and what happens between sinners and God. This other 'law court' is presided over by the 'one lawgiver and judge' (James 4:12), who is God himself. But the parallels do not end there. For sinners, their standing before God parallels that of the guilty who stand before an earthly judge. However, in this other 'court,' before justice can be carried out there is an intervention by the Judge himself. The accursed, against everything that they actually deserve, are cleared of all charges. They are given a righteousness, a standing before the law, which is not their own. In light of this, the charges are dropped. 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies' (Rom. 8:33), cries Paul. 'Who is to condemn?' (Rom. 8:34), Paul continues rhetorically. No one. There is not now, nor can there ever be, 'condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1)."<sup>8</sup>

Amen! What a Savior! This doctrine of justification is at the heart of the Gospel. It provides us with an understanding of how a sinner is counted right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. And this is primarily how the New Testament uses the language of "justification." This legal sense. This "being *declared* righteous and thus innocent before the law."<sup>9</sup>

However, there is a second way the language is used in the New Testament. If the first and primary way has to do with this righteousness "being *declared*," the secondary usage has to do with this righteousness "being *exhibited*" or evidenced.<sup>10</sup> And this is key for understanding what James is up to in chapter 2.

But before we consider James, let me give you some examples of that secondary sense so we can get an idea of what I'm talking about. In Matthew, chapter 11, Jesus is describing how his generation responded to Him and John the Baptist. Both were rejected, by and large, but because they're ministries had such a contrasting character, they were rejected with different slanderous accusations. Jesus explains,

*"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' <sup>19</sup> The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."* (Matthew 11:18-19)

What does Jesus mean when He says, "*wisdom is justified by her deeds*"? He means, clearly, that wisdom proves to be wisdom through wise works. "It is seen for what it is in the things that are said and done."<sup>11</sup> It proves itself. It evidences its nature. It exhibits its character. The proof is in the pudding, as they say.

Here's another New Testament example. There is a short hymn that Paul includes in his first letter to Timothy that reads as follows:

*"He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."* (1 Timothy 3:16)

He's clearly talking about Jesus. But you may be thinking, "What does this have to do with justification? Paul doesn't even use the language there?" Well, actually he does. That word translated "*vindicated*" is the word for "justified." And "*vindicated*" is a perfectly valid translation (and I would argue, the best translation) because it gets at the intent of what Paul was communicating and spares the modern English reader some potential confusion. He's not talking about the doctrine of justification here. He's not saying that Jesus was a sinner who, in order to avoid condemnation, needed to be *declared* righteous.

Paul, in this hymn, is contrasting the realms where Jesus was revealed—the heavenly realm and the earthly realm. Scholars quibble over which stanza relates to which realm and we're not going to get into that today. I simply want us to notice that when Paul says that Jesus was "justified" by the Spirit, he is not referring to the doctrine of justification. He has in mind how the Spirit of God demonstrated who Jesus truly was. The Spirit "*vindicated*" Jesus' identity and claims "first by his mighty works, and then supremely by his resurrection" (cf. Matt. 12:28; Rom. 1:4; 8:11).<sup>12</sup> The language, in this context, has to do with proof, evidence, vindication.

And that, friends, is how James in using the justification language in our text this morning. He asks, in verse 21, "*Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?*" Now that we have seen that justification language can be used in different ways, we are to ask: Does James have in mind that *primary* New Testament sense of justification or that *secondary* sense? Does he mean that Abraham was *counted* as righteous before God because he was willing to offer up his son or that he was *shown to be* righteous by that act? Are we talking about righteousness *being declared* or righteousness *being exhibited*? A righteous standing *given* or *proven*? And I would argue that, in each case, the answer is the latter.

This brings us to the second distinction between James and Paul—the different ways they use the life of Abraham. Why do they both appeal to Abraham to prove their point? Because, as one author explains, "Abraham was not just a man of faith; he was the archetypal man of faith....If you can prove a point from Abraham, you've won the argument!"<sup>13</sup>

When Paul mentions Abraham in the context of his teaching on the doctrine of justification, as we saw in previous weeks, he is contrasting how most people think they are made right with God (works) with how we are actually made right with God (faith in Christ). He says, for example,

*"What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.' <sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup> And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness..."* (Romans 4:1-5)

So Paul draws on the Old Testament account of Abraham—"the man of faith," as he calls him (Gal. 3:9)—to prove that our justification—our right standing before God—comes to us through faith. But notice the verse he quotes as evidence. It's Genesis 15:6. "*And [Abram] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*" In Genesis 15, God made or reiterated a series of promises to Abraham—the sum of these assurances is usually called the Abrahamic covenant—and Abraham takes God at His Word. That's faith. He trusted God. And because of that faith, God credited Abraham with righteousness. He counted him as righteous. That's the doctrine of justification by faith in action.

But look again at how James introduces Abraham into his argument. Look at verses 20 and 21...

*"Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?"* (James 2:20-21)

That is a reference to an event that takes place in Genesis 22, where God instructed Abraham to take Isaac, his son, to Mount Moriah and offer him up on an altar. Abraham obeys the Lord, but before he brings the knife

down upon his dear son, God intervenes and provides a substitute to die in his place. Abraham's faith was tested on that day and he passed the test. The whole story is meant to set up how God would offer His own Son one day for our sins. I have preached on that text a number of times, so I would refer you to some of those past sermons. But here's the point, while Paul and James are both drawing on Abraham, they cite different stories from his life for a reason.

You may not know much about Abraham's life, so let me situation these stories in context. We are first introduced to Abraham (who at the time was called Abram) in a genealogy at the end of Genesis 11. His story begins to be narrated for us in Genesis 12, where God calls him to leave his father's household and travel to a new land. Abraham was 75 years old when he heard that call (12:4). In chapter 16, where his son Ishmael was born, we are told he was 86 (16:16). So in Genesis 15, when "*Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness*" (Rom. 4:3; Gen. 15:6), he is most likely in his mid-80s. But his son Isaac, the son that James mentions, wasn't born until Abraham was 100 years old (Gen. 21:5). Most scholars agree that Isaac is at least a teenager when the events of Genesis 22 take place and Abraham brings him up the mountain. That means the "*Isaac on the altar*" event that James mentions takes place around 40 years after God first called Abraham.

Why does that matter? It matters because it shows that Paul and James are thinking of very different moments in Abraham's life and experience of faith. "James is asking us to consider what Abraham's faith looked like after forty years of perseverance."<sup>14</sup> He is looking at the climax of Abraham's faith as it is expressed in the narrative over decades. Whereas Paul is looking at Abraham's faith at its inception, how he responded when God made him a promise and called him to believe. Those are two very different points in Abraham's life.<sup>15</sup> Paul's illustration is akin to a believer's conversion experience. James' illustration has more to do with how a believer lives after their conversion and, in Abraham's case, after decades of walking with the Lord and nearing the end of life.

In a wonderful book, called *James vs. Paul*, Chris Bruno describes what James is up to in this way:

"To anyone who might point to Genesis 15:6 in isolation from its context, James is saying, 'Do you want to talk about Abraham's faith? Let's think about Abraham's faith forty years after he first believed God's promises.' His faith was active, alive, and resulted in obedient action. So then, James can conclude that in Abraham's decades of, to use a familiar but nonetheless true description, 'long obedience in the same direction,' his righteous status from Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled or confirmed."

But don't take Dr. Bruno's word for it. Look at the next verses in James, immediately after he mentions the story from Genesis 22...

*"You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God."* (James 2:22-23)

There it is. Genesis 15:6. So James, rightly, sees these two points in Abraham's life as related. The question is: How are they related? Fortunately for us, James answers that question.

Don't skip those first two words. When I start a sentence with the words "You see," very often what I mean is that I'm about to introduce some thought that I will then explain in greater detail. It's a transition. It's roughly equivalent to "You know" or "Now then." That's what is often meant when someone says "You see" at the start of a sentence. "But we can also use it literally", as Sam Allberry explains.

"...you see that I spilled ketchup down my shirt this morning. It is a thing visually apparent to anyone near enough to notice. James seems to be using the words in this sense. 'You see that a person is considered righteous...' means James is not talking about how someone is justified, but how you see—how you can tell—that someone is truly justified. His concern is not with the means of justification, but

with the visible evidence for it. This, after all, is the exact point James has been making throughout this passage.”<sup>16</sup>

So then, “*You see*” in Abraham’s actions with his son in Genesis 22, James is saying, that his “*faith was active along with his works*” (James 2:22). And then he adds, that Abraham’s “*faith was completed by his works*” or, your translation might read, his faith was “made perfect” (KJV) or “was perfected” (NASB; HCSB). What does that mean? It means that Abraham’s faith was “brought to greater maturity.”<sup>17</sup> This is the same language that James used back in chapter 1.

*“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. <sup>4</sup> And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* (James 1:2-4)

Do you see the “perfecting” language in both cases. As we saw when we studied chapter 1, that language is often used for maturation or bringing something to its intended goal. Commenting on these verses from chapter 1, Joel Beeke and Steven Lawson write,

“This sounds exactly like Abraham offering up Isaac. James is saying that God brings trials into our lives to develop and deepen our faith. The word *perfect* pictures fruit that is brought to maturity or ripeness. So it is with faith. It does not mean that our faith becomes absolutely perfect but that it is growing and developing and maturing through the trials we face.”<sup>18</sup>

That’s what happened in Abraham’s life. The faith we see in Genesis 15 is real, but it’s not as mature as the faith we see in Genesis 22. Like all of us, Abraham was a man in process. And if Abraham’s life is any indication of our own faith journey (and clearly James believe it is), then we can learn from that that “when we obey God (i.e., when we work), our faith grows up, matures, and is brought to completion.”<sup>19</sup> Put simply, “obedience matures faith.”<sup>20</sup> The potential application are myriad. Here’s one example, from David Platt, related to gathering on Sundays for corporate worship:

“By its nature faith creates works, and then in turn works complete faith....Works are good when they are the fruit of faith....If you come to a worship gathering fueled by the flesh in order to put on a face before men or to earn favor before God, then this work of worship does not bring honor to God. But if you’re coming is the fruit of faith, if you believe and love God, and if you trust that He knows what He is saying when He tells us not to forsake gathering together (Heb 10:25), your actions do honor God. When your faith drives you to corporate worship with God’s people, leading you to sing spiritual songs, listen to the Word of God, and fellowship with other believers, this is part of bringing your faith to maturity.”<sup>21</sup>

But I think the opposite is also true. There is a kind of “spiritual atrophy” that occurs when we slack off in our obedience to God. But when our faith produces in us obedient works, we are “exercising our spiritual muscles” and “our faith is being perfected” or matured.<sup>22</sup> So no wonder, in light of the climactic moment of Abraham’s faithful obedience, James observes that Abraham’s faith was completed/matured/perfected “*by his works*” (James 2:22). He doesn’t stop there. Look at the next verse, verse 23...

*“...and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God.”* (James 2:23)

That’s Genesis 15:6. That’s Paul’s prooftext for the doctrine of justification by faith alone. If James was trying to deny that doctrine, he just slit the throat of his own argument.<sup>23</sup> But that’s not his actual argument. What James shows us with verse 23 is that Abraham’s obedience in Genesis 22 was the “fulfillment” of his faith expressed on Genesis 15. That fulfillment language is common in prophetic contexts in the New Testament. So Matthew, for example, is famous for saying things like “this took place to fulfill what” this or that Scripture

predicted or anticipated (e.g., Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9). James is looking at God's covenant with Abraham and Abraham's response of faith in Genesis 15 as predictive or anticipatory of what takes place decades later in Genesis 22.<sup>24</sup> Why? Because if that faith in Genesis 15 was real and saving faith, then it will demonstrate itself by obedient works. So when Abraham obeyed God in Genesis 22, he demonstrated that his faith in Genesis 15 was the real deal. The obedience fulfilled what the existence of faith promised.

And it is at this point, in light of all of this solid reasoning on James' part, that he finally says those controversial words in 24...

*"You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."* (James 1:24)

In isolation, those words are troubling. But seen against the backdrop of the context we have considered, they make good sense. But we have to see that "justified" here is that secondary sense we find in the New Testament—having to do with how something is exhibited, proven, evidenced, confirmed, or vindicated—not in the primary sense—having to do with how a person is counted right before a holy God. You might say, faith alone justifies (i.e., grants us a right standing before God), but our faith itself is justified by our works (i.e., vindicated).<sup>25</sup> So hopefully we have seen this convincingly from James. Additionally, I trust, we have come to recognize that James is using Abraham to make a different (albeit compatible) point than Paul. Paul is concerned with what happens when a sinner first believes in Christ. James is concerned with how a person's subsequent life provides evidence that a person believed in a saving way.

In other words, the lesson in James is that our works validate the genuineness of our faith. They authenticate it. They prove faith's vitality. They are the fruit that grows from faith. And if they are absent, "then there are grounds for asking if a spiritual transformation has ever happened in the first place."<sup>26</sup>

That's not to say that our works save us. They don't save us. We cannot stress that enough. But they do give evidence that our faith was no mere profession. It's not the faith like the demons possess in verse 19. That "*faith alone*"—the dead faith that he has been talking about throughout this chapter—doesn't save anyone. The "faith" that is merely sentimental (2:15-17) or merely credal (2:18-19) or not loyal to God (20-24) or not hospitable to your neighbor (2:25-26) is not saving faith. It's dead faith (2:17, 26). Useless faith (2:20). It's faith in name only.<sup>27</sup> An empty profession. And the lack of obedient fruit makes this known.

This is why the Reformers insisted that we are saved by faith in Christ alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. Let me say it again: we are saved by faith in Christ alone, but the faith that saves is never alone. Or as Tim Keller has said, "A Christian is one who stops working to be saved, not one who stops working."<sup>28</sup> And, truth be told, for all his famous and pejorative words about James, Martin Luther understood this. In his commentary on Romans, he describes true and saving faith in much the same way as James does.

*"Oh, it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith; and so it is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly....It is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light fires."*<sup>29</sup>

You see his point? You can have a fire without also having light and heat, because light and heat are a consequence of fire. Always. So also you can't have saving faith without good works, because good works are a consequence of saving faith. Always.

So, in the end, when you compare Romans 3 and 4 with James 2, you discover that each author is actually addressing different situations. James is writing to warn his readers about "phony faith," whereas Paul was writing to warn his readers about "phony works" that people rely on to make them right with God instead of faith. Bruno offers a helpful chart to capture these distinctions.<sup>30</sup>

	Faith	Works	Justification
<b>James</b>	Exposing phony faith that cannot justify	Emphasizes works that flow from faith	God's initial declaration fulfilled through a life of faithfulness
<b>Paul</b>	Emphasizes faith in Christ alone as the means of justification	Exposes phony works that cannot justify	God's initial declaration, which will be demonstrated in life and confirmed at final judgment

What I want to show you next time, however, is that James and Paul actually teach the same thing when the rest of their writings are brought into the mix. I want to show you that they are preaching the same Gospel. And, finally, we'll consider why we need what *both* James and Paul have to offer.

But let me add a pastoral remark or two before we conclude. Obviously James wants each of us to ask, "Do I have real and saving faith or have I simply made an empty profession?" And clearly he wants us to consider whether our lives are marked by obedience to answer that question. But the truth is that none of our lives are marked by obedience all the time. So that means that there are going to be different people who respond differently to James words.

Some of you have a "tender conscience," which is probably a good thing most of the time. But the downside of that disposition is that you can become so preoccupied with your inconsistencies and moral deficiencies that you fail to notice the ways your life does evidence faith through faith-fueled deeds.<sup>31</sup> You know that you are not who you should be in every respect, but you have trouble seeing that you are not who you once were either. God has been changing your life. It's a process. It's sometimes slow and hard to discern, but it's real and it's happening because "*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion*" (Phil. 1:6). What you need to be reminded of today is the Gospel. Christ died for your sins. He rose from the dead securing your victory. And every aspect of our salvation is owing to His work, not yours. His performance, not yours. So don't trust in your performance any given season. Trust in Christ. And if that's your posture today, then you don't have the phony faith that James is warning about. By God's grace, you have the real deal. And your life will evidence it.

But there are others gathered in this place whose problem is not a tender conscience but one that has grown callous. You hear James words and you immediately assume that his warning is not meant for you. You "run a cursory self-diagnostic, think of a handful of good Christian deeds [you've] done recently, check the 'James 2' box, and then move on."<sup>32</sup> If the problem for the person with a tender conscience is that they struggle to detect the "genuine good" in their life, yours is that your pride may lead to you overlooking "the genuine problems." You "see the good deed and miss the many sinful attitudes bubbling away under the surface."<sup>33</sup>

Sam Allberry offers some helpful advice for both personalities and I'll close the sermon with his remarks:

"In both cases, our self-assessment is superficial. We need to take our time, and we need God's help. We need to pray with David: 'But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults' (Psalm 19:12). We need God to show us where we are truly at, especially if we know we are prone to have a very slanted view of ourselves. One of the means God can use, of course, is Christian people who know us well and who will be honest with us—and we then need to be willing to hear their answer, whether it confirms or corrects what we think.

There may be some who read this part of James and rightly conclude that they are not Christians. That is part of James' aim after all—to expose false faith. Though that might sound like a negative aim to have, it is enormously important. As we've seen, such (counterfeit) faith does us no good at all. To realise that is an essential and positive step. We need to jettison false faith if we are to enjoy true faith.



The best way to respond in such situations is to pray to God about it: to confess the false faith and ask him for true faith. In fact, asking for faith is itself one of the first signs that God is giving it to us!”<sup>34</sup>

Let’s pray...

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<sup>1</sup> David P. Nystrom points out: “James even makes his point with a bit of wry humor in the form of a wordplay: Faith without works (*ergon*) does not work (*arge*= *a* + *ergos*).” David P. Nystrom, *James* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 153.

<sup>2</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 141.

<sup>3</sup> This is suggested, for example, by David Platt in *Exalting Jesus in James* (CCE; Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 46-47.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Allberry, *James For You* (The Good Book Company, 2015), 82.

<sup>5</sup> Platt, 48.

<sup>6</sup> “Next, we need to notice that James has been using the word ‘faith’ in a slightly different way from Paul. For Paul, faith is trusting Christ; we are saved by faith alone, because it is the saving work of Christ alone that we trust. But James has been using “faith” more broadly, describing not just trust in Christ, but the claim to be trusting in Christ. Hence his question at the start of this section about the person who professes faith but has no deeds: ‘Can such faith save them?’ (James 2:14, my emphasis). Faith here refers to their profession of trust.” Allberry, 83.

<sup>7</sup> See the helpful discussion in Nystrom, 160-163. For more on how the Protestant Reformers teased out these distinctions, see <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/faith-defined/>.

<sup>8</sup> Wells, 140.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 140-141.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>12</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guarding the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (BST; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 107.

<sup>13</sup> Allberry, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Christ Bruno, *Paul vs. James: What We’ve Been Missing in the Faith and Works Debate* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 82.

<sup>15</sup> “This is a critical distinction because Genesis 15:6 is when Abraham exercised saving faith in God and was justified. Genesis 15 is when God transferred His own perfect righteousness into the morally bankrupt account of Abraham. But verse 21 references Genesis 22 and what happened later in his sanctification—to an incident three decades after Abraham had been justified by faith. This is a different kind of justification.” Joel R. Beeke and Steven J. Lawson, *Root and Fruit: Harmonizing Paul and James on Justification* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2020), 56.

<sup>16</sup> Allberry, 83-84.

<sup>17</sup> Beeke and Lawson, 58.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Platt, 52.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. He also gives example related to “spending concentrated time in prayer and Bible study” and “caring for the poor”.

<sup>22</sup> Beeke and Lawson, 59

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>24</sup> See BDAG, πληρώω, 4.a.

<sup>25</sup> Beeke and Lawson, 64.

<sup>26</sup> Well, 142.

<sup>27</sup> Nystrom, 153.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy Keller, *Romans 1-7* (The Good Book Company, 2014), 97.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel Classics, 1976), xvii.

<sup>30</sup> Bruno, 109.

<sup>31</sup> Allberry, 87.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.