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James 2:14-26

Self-Deception and Justification

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, there's really no way to sugar coat it. This is a difficult text. I've said before that there are different kinds of difficult texts. Some texts are just hard to understand what is being said. You read three theologians and you get five interpretations.

Some texts are pretty simple, they are just hard to obey, or hard to submit to. They require something of us, self-denial, sacrificial service, counter-cultural living or something like that. We know what it says, we just struggle to do it.

This text this morning is fairly unique. I doubt it's the only one, but I couldn't think of any other examples. This text is difficult not because of anything in the text, but simply because of how it has been fought over in recent history.

James himself is really quite clear in this text. He makes one point, and then repeats himself four or five different ways. True faith is always made visible by works. That's his point, that's all he's trying to say. If you say you have faith, but it produces no godliness, that is not saving faith. Saving faith bears godly fruit. That's James' point.

But, ever since the Reformation recovery of the gospel of justification by faith alone without works, this text has become something of a battlefield.

James, like I've said before, is very simple, and very straight to the point. Again, deep, richly theological, but simple. So, this passage is meant to be a red-hot knife to cut to the bone and make a strong *practical* point. So, while we'll need to get into some of the weeds to address some of the more recent controversies, I don't want us to lose sight of the simple and urgent point that James is making here.

True faith is not a matter of getting some doctrines right, affirming the right things and going about your business. True faith is not just a blathering of mere words, a repeating of someone else's opinions. True faith is a radical encounter with Jesus Christ that transforms you forever.

With that in mind, I have three goals for this morning. First, of course, I want to show you what this text says. I'll spend most of the time arguing what James *is* saying and let that refute what James is *not* saying.

James is saying that faith always produces works. Works are how faith makes itself visible in the human sphere. And if your faith does not produce works, it's not saving faith. Faith alone saves, and James never refutes that, but only a certain kind of faith, the kind of faith that produces works.

Second, I do want to do something of a counter-offensive. I want to try to expose the fatal flaw of all works-based religion. And really, it's not what we might assume. The flaw of legalism is not that God is more easy-going than we thought, but that he is far more holy, and his law is far more strict than we could imagine. The flaw of legalism is that it has a far too small view of God and his law.

Every great gospel recovery in history has begun with a recovery of the holiness of God and the strictness of his law. This was true for the Puritans and the Great Awakenings in the English-speaking world a few hundred years ago.

This was true for Luther in the Reformation. Luther's first step towards Reform wasn't to argue that God's law isn't that big of a deal, but that silly things like penance and indulgences meant nothing if they aren't coupled with an earnest pursuit of holiness.

Luther's first argument wasn't that Rome took the law too seriously, but that they mocked it with their silly rituals thinking that their merits could answer to the holiness of God. In other words, Luther's first step to reform was a step towards the holiness of God and the strictness of his law. That is the first step towards the gospel.

And this was true for Jesus himself. His first critique of the Pharisees was not that they took the law too seriously but that they were piddling around with externals, with tithing their spice rack and weren't taking the law's comprehensive requirements seriously. They mocked God's holiness by thinking that they could satisfy it with their silly little rules and rituals.

The fatal flaw, the problem of works-based religion is that it belittles the holiness of God.

Then my third goal is to show you how this applies to you.

Three goals: what does the text say? What is the fatal flaw in works-based salvation? How does this passage apply to you?

Let's pray, then get to work.

Big Idea

Ok, so first off, what's the big idea of this passage? What is the Holy Spirit saying through the apostle James? Here it is: *true faith always produces works*. Real faith, genuine faith, saving faith, always results in genuine works, genuine godliness, genuine life-change.

It is important to remember to read James in context. This whole book is a tightly woven letter. Everything he says in the body of the letter, chapters 2 through 5, he said in seed form in chapter one.

Pastor Michael mentioned the concept of amplification last week. That's super helpful. He drew that spiral moving out from the central idea. And that's exactly what James is doing. He's circling back to ideas that he has already introduced, and he's deepening them, or amplifying them.

In chapter 1 verse 19 James said, **"let every person be quick to hear."** Then, in verse 22 he said, **"be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."**

That's the central point that James is circling back to in this passage, that is what James is amplifying here.

"Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." This is the big point that James is making.

In today's passage, James's opponent is not salvation by faith alone. James's opponent, the thing he is going after is the self-deception that convinces you that hearing God's Word is the same as obeying God's Word.

Last week, at the beginning of chapter 2, James said, **"show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory."**

Then this week, James is giving another explanatory note about what it means to hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. James is continuing to answer the question: what is true faith? What does faith in the Lord Jesus Christ actually look like? Is it just a notional thing, just about affirming a set of ideas? Or does this faith actually transform you?

True faith is the soul's response to having seen God.

True faith sees Jesus Christ, and in him sees the glory of God. True faith sees the kindness of God in sending Christ. True faith sees the holiness of God in Christ fulfilling the law. True faith sees the love of God in Christ dying for your sins. True faith sees the power of God to defeat sin, to defeat death in the resurrection of Christ.

True faith sees the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And true faith is radically transformed by this seeing.

True faith is exposed by the holiness of God, even condemned and killed by the holiness of God. But then true faith is resurrected to new life by the holiness of God.

The temptation, the self-deception that James wants to warn us about is the temptation to replace this true transforming faith with a mere profession, a bare profession of belief with no real inner transformation.

And James is having none of that. James would call that self-deception.

True living faith produces works. True living faith transforms you.

Let's pick through the text, I'm going to try to show you a few key details here. Hopefully, you'll start to see what James is getting at here. It's really easy, especially this side of the Reformation, to read this passage too quickly, and jump to conclusions about what he is saying without really noting the details.

Sometimes we misunderstand James simply because we don't know what question he is actually answering.

Verse 14 says, **"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"** There are a few things you need to notice here. First, note that he says, *"if someone says."* He's not arguing against faith *as it really is*, but the bare profession of faith. He's saying, imagine someone says, "I've repented of my sin. I believe in Jesus." But there's no fruit of it in his life. Is this saving faith? Is saving faith just wearing a cross neckless? Or does true faith actually change you? This is the question James is pursuing.

Next, notice the perspective of this scenario. This isn't a conversation about the internal realities as God sees them. This is a conversation about the external, observable facts as people can see them.

It's not, "what does true faith accomplish before the throne of God?" That's not what James is asking. But "What does true faith look like from a human perspective?" That's what James is asking.

This is the set-up, this is the question that James is answering throughout the rest of this passage. And again, he's pleading with you. Don't be deceived. Don't just be a hearer. True saving faith is more than bare profession. True saving faith always produces true gospel transformation.

Next in 15 and 16 he gives an illustration to make a comparison. This is another place that we might get tripped up. Again, if we read over this too quickly we'll assume he's saying one thing and totally miss the point he's actually trying to make.

15 and 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?"**

If we're reading this from the wrong perspective, it's easy to read this something like, "faith only saves if it's coupled with feeding the poor."

That's not what James is doing. He's comparing faith with love. He's saying, like love – the desire for someone else's good – faith is not just about sentimental pleasant feelings. Like love, faith is seen in its fruit.

He's saying, if you say you have love, but have no fruits of love, no works of love, then whatever you might have, you don't have love. Just like, if you say you have faith, but there's not works, no fruit, whatever you have, it's not true faith.

It's not that the works make the love real, but real love results in works. It's not the works that make the faith real, but real faith results in works.

Here's his scenario. He says if you run into a brother or sister on the street, note that, it's not some stranger, it's a brother or sister, it's one of your fellow church members. It's not even just generically a Christian, but someone who is a member at your church.

You run into him on the street, and he's sitting outside in a tee-shirt in February. You go and talk to him and ask him what's going on. Turns out he lost his job and had to sell his coat for lunch. But that was yesterday, and today he has no coat, and no lunch.

If you go, "ah man, I'm so sorry to hear that. Tell you what, I have a lunch appointment I'm running late for. Ah, man, I love you, I care about you. I really hope you get back on your feet. But, I uh, gotta run, I'm already running late. Sorry man, I really hope things turn around for you."

What does that prove? You said you love him. Do you? Apparently not. If you loved him, you'd actually do something to help him out. You'd let him crash on the couch for a while. You'd get him lunch. You'd buy him a coat. Something. True love is seen in the works, just like true faith is seen in the works.

Then verse 17, **"So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."**

He's comparing love to faith. True love is seen in its fruit, true faith is seen in its fruit. You might genuinely wish that your fellow church member gets back on his feet. You might genuinely want good for him. But, if it's in

your power to help and you don't, positive feelings towards someone is not love. Feeling bad about someone's misery is not love.

In the same way, you might genuinely believe that God exists, you might genuinely believe that Jesus rose from the dead. You might genuinely believe the facts of the gospel and think positive thoughts about Jesus. But if that doesn't produce actual repentance, actual trust, actual gospel transformation, those mere positive thoughts about Jesus is not saving faith.

That's his first argument true faith, like true love, is seen in its fruit.

Then in 18, he starts to make a similar argument, but from a slightly different angle.

Verse 18, **"But someone will say, 'you have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."**

There is a good deal of debate about what exactly this verse means. A lot of the uncertainty comes from the quotation marks. I've mentioned before that in both Hebrew and Greek there were no such things as quotation marks. This means that where the quote ends is a bit up for interpretation.

I think there's a good argument to be made that the quotation marks should go all the way until the end of verse 23.

English doesn't have a distinct plural form for the second person pronoun. So, in English you can't tell if the speaker is addressing an individual or a group just based on the pronoun. English doesn't have a different 'you' for the plural. But Greek does.

From 18 through 23 (what I think is the quotation) all the 'you's' are singular, addressing one person. And in the rest of the passage they are plural, addressing James' audience as a whole. It seems like 18 through 23 is basically a hypothetical argument that James sets up between two 'someone's.'

In verse 14 he brings in the first 'someone' who says he has faith, but has no works. We've seen him already. Then here in verse 18 he brings in a second someone – who basically stands in for James – who is arguing with the first someone. The second someone is making James' argument, but for whatever reason James wants to set it up as a conversation between one hypothetical guy and another.

Why does he do this? Why doesn't he just say, "some of you think this way, here's why that's bad?" Why does he add this clunky rhetorical device?

He doesn't give us a footnote to explain himself, but it is not uncommon for the Apostles to use various rhetorical devices to soften some of their harshest rebukes and critiques.

One other place that we see this is Paul's letter to the Galatians. We talked about this a bit in the men's Bible study the last few months. In Galatians Paul certainly has some strong words for the Galatians, but his harshest critiques, his harshest rebukes he always aims at the false teachers, not the church as a whole.

For the Galatians it's "I'm astonished that you are so quickly turning away." Basically, an apostolic, "I'm disappointed in you."

But then for the false teachers, those who are leading them astray, he says, "let him be accursed." 'How could you listen to these guys? They are condemned.'

So, it's possible that James is trying to soften some of the blow from what he's about to say. Look at what James says within this hypothetical argument. Verse 19, 'even the demons have that kind of faith.' Verse 20, 'you foolish person.'

James has some hard things to say, but he couches his harshest critiques in this abstracted hypothetical argument. Now, he's not trying to trick anyone. Everyone knows who he's talking to. He's assuming that his audience, at least he's hoping that his audience will rightly see themselves – or at least some of their tendencies – in the first someone and will see James in the second someone.

And yet still, he doesn't want to just blast them. He kind of abstracts the blasting to someone else. This is incredible gentleness. This is fatherly love at its best.

All of us should learn from this whenever we have a harsh critique to give, but especially dads.

Dads you need to study this. James isn't backing away from the hard conversation, but he isn't just blasting these people either.

Often dads can err in either of those two directions. Either we just don't want to engage where we should be engaging, or on the other side, when we engage, we just drop the hammer.

But dads, study James on this. Find ways to target your harshest critiques, your harshest rebukes not directly at your kids. Not so much so that they miss the point. They should leave the conversation feeling thoroughly rebuked, but find ways to soften it, to abstract it away from them a bit.

Speak the truth in love. Don't beat around the bush but find ways to be gentle whenever possible.

So, what is James's proxy saying in verse 18, **"You have faith, but I have works. Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."**

Remember, this is all from the human perspective, one person to another, this is not talking about God's perspective on the heart. So, the other guy has a profession of faith, remember, he 'says he has faith, but no works.'

Then notice the end of the verse, **"I will show you my faith by my works."** This is so important. Here in James, works don't have a *salvific* function but a *revelatory* function. Works don't save, but works *reveal* true saving faith. My works, says James, show my faith. The important thing is the faith, but person to person, you can only *see* the faith through the works.

Then 19, **"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!"** Basically, believing true facts about God and the gospel is not saving faith. You believe there's only one God? So do the demons. You believe Jesus is real? So do the demons. You believe that Jesus rose from the dead? So do the demons. You believe Christ is Lord? The demons know that very well. Mere knowledge of gospel facts is not saving faith.

Next, in 20 through 23 James turns to the example of Abraham. James is saying that Abraham's faith was demonstrated to be genuine saving faith when it was put to the test. When Abraham was tested, his faith was proven and demonstrated to be genuine because of his works.

In Genesis 12, God promised Abraham that he would be given a son, and through this son God would bless the whole world. Then in Genesis 15, Abraham is having some doubts, and God doubles down on the promise, 'through your very own offspring I will bless the world.'

In response to that Abraham believes, and it's this faith that is counted as righteousness, that's what James quotes in verse 23.

Abraham's faith is put to the test in Genesis 22 when God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

In the end, God stops Abraham, and sends a ram to be sacrificed instead, but he wanted to test Abraham.

If Abraham had doubted God's faithfulness to his promise, or God's power to fulfill his promise no matter what, Abraham might have refused to obey. But Abraham believed. Abraham's faith was shown to be genuine in his obedience.

Abraham was counted righteous through faith; James mentions that in verse 23, that's salvation. But he's shown to be righteous, he's demonstrated to be righteous through his works.

James' point is not that Abraham was saved by works, but that Abraham was shown to be righteous by his works.

I want to try to show you that by zooming in on three words in these three verses.

What does "justified" mean in verse 21?

What does "completed" mean at the end of 22?

And what does "fulfilled" mean at the beginning of 23?

Very briefly. In the New Testament there are two different uses of the word "Justify." There is *declarative* justification, and *demonstrative* justification, and they both use the exact same word.

Declarative justification is where God declares you righteous, he counts you righteous on behalf of the righteousness of Christ. This is Romans 3:23-24, **“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”**

Declarative justification is where God forgives your sin because of Christ’s death, and credits you with Christ’s righteousness and so counts you as righteous.

Then *demonstrative* justification is where someone is demonstrated to be righteous. His righteousness is in some fashion put on display. This is what is happening with Abraham here, and Rahab at the end of the passage. Their righteousness is demonstrated by works.

Often, English translations, to avoid confusion, will translate this second kind of justification as ‘vindicate’ instead of justify, even though it’s the same word in Greek. Vindicate means that a righteous person is finally seen to be righteous – they were righteous already, they are just now somehow shown to be righteous.

One place that the New Testament uses justification in this demonstrative sense is in 1 Timothy 3:16. There, the ESV, reads like this: **“[Christ] was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations...”** The word rendered ‘vindicated’ there is the exact same word that James uses here for ‘justified.’

Christ was not made righteous by the Spirit, but he was *demonstrated* to be righteous by the Spirit.

Declarative justification makes a sinner to be counted righteous before God. This is what James is pointing to in verse 23, Abraham was counted righteous.

But *demonstrative* justification makes visible the righteousness that was already there. Abraham’s faith, and Abraham’s righteousness was demonstrated by works when he offered up Isaac.

Ok, much quicker, what does ‘completed’ mean in verse 22? **“Faith was completed by his works?”**

He’s not saying, ‘faith was powerless until works made it saving.’ He’s saying that works puts faith on display.

Jesus uses the same word in 2 Corinthians 12:9. There, Jesus says to Paul, **“My power is made perfect in weakness.”** ‘Made perfect’ there is the same word as ‘completed’ here. “My power is *completed* in weakness.”

Paul’s weakness is not somehow supplying some deficiency that Jesus’ power somehow lacked, just like works don’t fill up some deficiency in faith. Think of it something like ‘glorified,’ or ‘demonstrated,’ or ‘put on display.’

Works complete faith in the same way that our weakness completes Jesus’ power.

One more. What does “fulfilled” mean in verse 23? **“the Scripture was fulfilled,”**

Basically, the same thing that we’ve been seeing. This scripture was demonstrated to be true, this scripture was underlined when this happened. What was said to be true of Abraham in Genesis 15 was shown to be true of Abraham in Genesis 22.

Abraham’s righteousness is demonstrated by his works. What became true of him by faith in Genesis 15, was shown to be true of him by works in Genesis 22.

Ok, then we get to verse 24. Now, remember, this is where James pulls back up out of his hypothetical argument. The you here is plural.

Here he summarizes the point he’s making about Abraham.

Verse 24, **“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”**

Now, it’s important that you read this verse in its entirety. James really means what he says here. We can misread this verse if we just read it as **“a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”**

But that’s not what James says, he says, **“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”**

Again, we need to remember the perspective that James is taking in this section. He isn’t talking about the *value* of faith before the throne of God. He’s talking about the *visibility* of faith before each other.

Abraham is *declared* righteous by faith alone, but Abraham is *demonstrated* to be righteous by works, you see that Abraham is righteous by works. This is a demonstrative justification.

Now 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?”** Again, here he’s just saying that Rahab’s faith was made visible by her works, was proven to be genuine by her works.

If she had said, “we’ve heard about what God did to Egypt 40 years ago, and I know that God has given you this land, but I can’t help you, it’s too risky,” then she would have had a profession of faith, but not a true saving faith. But her true saving faith was shown in the fact that she risked her life to help the spies, because she knew by faith that God had given them the land. Because she put her life on the line, she showed that she really believes what she said she believes. Her faith showed itself in action.

Verse 26, **“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”**

It could be easy to press this too far. He’s not trying to make some complex metaphysical point about works being the soul of faith or anything like that. He’s just saying, a bare profession of faith, confessing some true things about Jesus, relates to true faith like a corpse relates to a man.

A body without the spirit looks like a man, but it’s just a corpse. In the same way, a profession of faith might talk the talk, it will bear some similarities to true faith, but it’s dead. It’s not real faith.

This is James’s big point here. True faith results in transformation. True faith results in works. True faith can be seen in works.

Here, he pleads with you. Don’t be deceived. It can be so easy to have a bare profession. To believe some true things about Jesus, to go to church, to be a nice guy, and to deceive yourself that that is true saving faith.

To have a bare profession but know nothing of the new birth, to know nothing about the evil of sin, to know nothing about the sweetness of the gospel.

It’s so easy to be generally polite, generally well behaved in public, to affirm some true things about Jesus, to have some genuine admiration of Jesus as a good teacher and yet have only the corpse of faith, only the husk of faith.

True faith transforms you. Let me give you four ways that true faith transforms you.

First, true faith humbles you. True faith gives you fresh eyes to see your sin in the light of God’s holiness. Without faith, you only ever see your sin compared to the people around you. Compared to other people, you’re really not that bad. But true faith gives you new eyes to see God’s holiness and to finally compare your sin to the true standard.

Before the Holy Spirit opens your eyes to see God’s holiness and to see the depth of your own sin there’s always going to be this assumption that if you work hard enough you can be good enough to earn God’s approval, and to earn eternal life. That somehow, I contribute to my own salvation.

And this is the fatal flaw of works-based religion. This is the fatal flaw of legalism. It’s not that they miss one or two verses, or that they misread a passage here or there. It’s that legalism radically belittles the holiness of God.

Job 4:17-18, **“Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker? Even in his servants he puts no trust, and his angels he charges with error.”** If you would be saved by works, if you would be pure on your own merit before God, you must be more perfect than the angels.

Isaiah 64:6, **“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”** Even our good deeds, in our sin, are a stench in God’s nostrils.

Matthew 5:48, **“You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly father is perfect.”** God’s approval doesn’t require that our good deeds outweigh our bad. God’s approval requires perfection. Our perfection, our holiness, to be saved by works, has to answer to God’s holiness, God’s perfection.

This is why works-based salvation falls so flat. The legalists’s problem is not that he takes God’s law and God’s holiness too seriously. The legalist’s problem is that he thinks God’s law is such a piddly thing, such a trivial thing, that his little works of righteousness can fully satisfy the infinite God.

God’s holiness requires perfect holiness. God’s law requires perfect obedience. Only Christ has satisfied this. There is no hope for you in your own works. There is no hope for you outside of faith in Christ.

This is the biblical doctrine of justification, of declarative, forensic justification. The law requires perfect obedience, and death for sin. There’s a precept: perfect obedience. And a penalty: death for sin.

Christ and Christ alone has perfectly fulfilled the precept, the requirement of the law.

Christ also died a sinner’s death that he did not deserve. The righteous for the unrighteous. He took the curse from us by becoming a curse for us.

And this is what the gospel holds out for you. If you will receive Jesus by faith, he will be your Lord and your Savior, and he will receive you as his child, as his son, as his daughter. If you will receive Jesus by faith, his righteous life will count for yours. If you will receive Jesus by faith his atoning death will count for yours.

The law requires perfection. You cannot outweigh your sin with good deeds. The law requires death for sin, you cannot make up for a single sin with a mountain of good deeds.

If you will receive Jesus by faith, the law will be satisfied on your account – the precept fulfilled, and the penalty paid.

This is why legalism and license are two sides of the same coin. Both legalism, the idea that you can earn God’s favor through your own obedience, and license, the idea that you don’t have to worry about obeying God’s law because of grace, they both see God’s law as a small, piddly, trivial thing.

This is why some people tend to bounce back and forth between legalism and license thinking that one is the cure for the other. They have the same root problem. They both belittle God’s holiness and law.

The cure for both the spiritual pride of legalism and the moral indifference of license is the gospel of salvation in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone. Only there do you see the holiness of God calling you out of your indifference and pride, and only there do you see the love of God lifting you up from your despair and shame.

So, the first way that faith transforms us is that it humbles us.

Second, true faith transforms you because it gives you love for God. **“We love because he first loved us.”**¹ When we see God’s holiness, and God’s love for us to send his Son to take on flesh, to take on death, to take on the cross, when we see his love by faith, he fills our heart with love for him. He loved me to the cross, I can love him in obedience.

Third, true faith transforms you through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It’s by faith, Paul says, that we receive the Holy Spirit². The Holy Spirit renews your heart, writes the law of God on your heart, and guides you day by day, through the word, through the church, and through your conscience, little by little training you to renounce ungodliness³ and to be zealous for good works.⁴ So, true faith means that we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit.

¹ 1 John 4:19.

² Galatians 3:2.

³ Titus 2:12.

⁴ Titus 2:14.

Fourth, true faith transforms you by making you zealous for the glory of God. True faith makes you desire God's kingdom and pray for it's coming. True faith teaches you to seek the kingdom of God, and to make much of his fame.

Faith transforms you to want to work for Christ's kingdom and glory. The glory of God motivates you to pursue self-control to glorify God in your body. The glory of God motivates you to pursue love for neighbor to glorify God by showing his love for the world. The glory of God motivates you to pursue love for God to glorify God by showing his supremacy over the world – he is better than anything the world can offer.

True faith humbles you. True faith fills you with love. True faith receives the Holy Spirit. True faith is zealous for the glory of God. True faith is seen in its fruit.

This is James's big point here: *don't be deceived; saving faith, given the opportunity, produces works.*

Application

I'll close out with just a couple brief comments on application then we'll be done. In this passage James gives us a spiritual thermometer. Here's how you can take the temperature on your faith.

This can be helpful in basically three scenarios.

Scenario one, you have strong and vibrant faith, but you might not see it that way. Maybe you have been reading your Bible lately, and you haven't been having the same emotional response that you used to. Or maybe you haven't been as emotionally impacted by singing in worship like you used to. But, when you look at self-control, love for neighbor, and distinction from the sins of the world (the things that James pointed us to a few weeks ago), you're actually doing pretty well. In other words, your emotional response might not be at a high point, but the works are there, the fruit of genuine faith is there. James would say 'I can see your faith in your works. You should be encouraged.'

Scenario two, you have true faith, but it's kind of at a low ebb. Again, maybe the emotions are there, maybe they aren't. But, you are indulging in greed or anger, or crude joking, or pride, or lust more than before. You're not sacrificially considering others, and you're blending in more and more with the world. Maybe you're having powerful emotional responses in your daily Bible reading, but James would say, your fruit seems to be withering on the vine. For you this passage should be a bucket of cold water to wake you up a bit.

Then scenario three, you affirm true things about Jesus, maybe you even come to church regularly, but when you look for godliness in self-control, love for neighbor, and distinction from the world, it's just not there. You do, and say, and think whatever your flesh suggests, and you fit right in with the thought and behavior of the world around you. James would say, whatever genuine belief this might be, this is a dead faith. A faith that will not save, that cannot save.

And this isn't condemnation. Even still this is a kindness. Affirming some true things about Jesus isn't saving faith. But this is an invitation. Call out to Jesus, plead with him to give you true faith. To save you, to renew you, to transform you. No one who earnestly seeks Jesus will be turned away.

So where are you? Where are you this morning? And don't answer this question just thinking about this past weekend. Think about the last year, or the last five years. Should this passage be an encouragement to you? There could be a thousand reasons that your Bible reading just doesn't feel the way it used to, but do you see the fruit of faith in your life?

Or should this passage be a bucket of cold water to wake up your sleepy faith?

Or should this passage be a bit more of a stern warning? Have you actually been born again? Or did you just kind of learn to walk and talk like a Christian? You must be born again.

And now, wherever you are, remember this is just the thermometer, this is not the medicine. True gospel works don't come from anxiously trying to bear more fruit. True gospel works come from beholding Jesus. So, if you're thinking you're a scenario two or scenario three person the call isn't to double down on your works, but to look to Jesus. Behold Jesus. Study Jesus.

See him in all his holiness and glory. See him in all his humility and gentleness. See him in all his wisdom and authority. See him in his tender love and mercy held out to you. See Jesus. Look to Jesus and be made new.

True faith produces good works.

A tree is known by its fruit.

Lord's Supper

Today we will be observing the Lord's Supper. If you want to know more about the Supper, we have a little write up on the back of the service guide there. If you are visiting with us and have professed faith in Jesus Christ, been biblically baptized by immersion on profession of faith, and are a member of a local church, we invite you to take this meal with us this morning.

This Supper keeps our minds fixed on Christ.

Your good works cannot give you peace with God. Christ's broken body, broken for your sin, and Christ's spilled blood, as the blood of the new covenant can give you peace with God.

So Christian, come and take. Come and feast on Christ's broken body and shed blood. Feast and remember. Feast and be strengthened. Feast and hope, looking to the day when we finally feast with Christ in his kingdom.