

Belief that Behaves

(An Exposition of James 2:14-26)

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During the Spanish-American War, Clara Barton, the founder of the Red Cross, was working in Cuba. One day Colonel Theodore Roosevelt came to her and offered to buy food for some of his sick and wounded Rough Riders. But she refused to sell him what he wanted. Roosevelt could not understand. He cared about his men, and he was going to pay for the supplies out of his own funds. So he went to the surgeon in charge, who said to him, "Colonel, just ask for it!" A smile broke over Roosevelt's face. Now he understood--the provisions were not for sale. "I will ask for it," he said, and when he did, he got the food at once. In a similar way, when it comes to salvation, we must simply ask for it (Romans 10:13), since we cannot earn or merit salvation (Eph. 2:8-9) through a lifelong system of works (legalism).

Many oppose the Biblical teaching that salvation is free (Rom. 3:24) and that faith in Christ is all that is needed for a person to be saved, even though Jesus clearly taught in John 6:47, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Lordship Salvation teachers will often use the epistle of James to support the theory that works are part of true saving faith at the time of one's salvation. Many assume that works, at the point of one's conversion, are a necessary expression of faith in order for a person to demonstrate that their faith is genuine (Reformed Theology). In essence, many claim that a person must promise to become a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ the rest of his life in order to be saved (Lordship Salvation). In other words, at the time of his salvation, a sinner must make a commitment to *do* something, *become* something, and *follow* something in order for his faith to be genuine.

In addition, many liberal-based denominations will use the epistle of James to teach a legalistic salvation. They will conclude that a person is saved, if they do what is right by participating in the sacraments of the church, (sacramental salvation), following the golden rule, and living by the teachings Jesus gave us in the sermon on the mount. Roman Catholicism specifically teaches that the good works present in sanctifying grace are part of man's lifelong response toward God, so he might eventually merit or gain his justification, through a process of living correctly (legalism). They base their conclusions on James chapter two and church traditions.

In spite of what Lordship Salvation and works-based denominations teach, it's very clear that the epistle of James does not teach that good works must accompany faith at the point of a person's conversion, nor does it teach that good works have any part in justifying a person before God. Nevertheless, Martin Luther called the epistle of James "a right strawy epistle" since in his mind the epistle contradicted what Paul taught regarding justification by faith alone. Luther shouted "heresy" to the conclusions of James because he did not understand what James was teaching. However, Luther failed to see that Paul argued for the *priority* of faith over works in regard to a person's salvation (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16) while James argued for the *proof* of faith (James 2:26), through a changed life, which becomes a secondary marker that confirms the genuineness of a person's salvation experience.

In Paul's writings, he is combatting a Jewish legalism that insisted upon the need for works to be justified. In the writings of James, he insists upon the need for works in the lives of those who have already been justified by faith. Let's put things in proper, theological order. Salvation is *determined* by faith alone in Christ (Gal. 3:26) but it is *demonstrated* by faithfulness and obedience to God's will alone (John 10:27). Works are not *part* of saving faith (Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 4:5); they *follow* saving faith (Eph. 2:10). Works do not accompany faith at the time of conversion; they become a witness to one's faith after salvation, confirming a person's salvation. God does not ask men to *behave* in order to be saved, but to *believe* (Acts 16:31). However, behavior, or a change of life, does follow faith. Fruit follows faith (Matt. 13:8; John 15:1-6; Rom. 7:4).

The old axiom is true:

"Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone."

James is talking about a belief that behaves. He is teaching that all genuine belief in Christ will result in a change of behavior. James has a practical application in mind, regarding how works give evidence of saving faith. He was not sharing the theological truth of how people are *legally* justified before God but how their life *confirms* their justification before God. The *prerequisite* for salvation is faith; however, the *product* of salvation is works. This passage of Scripture is teaching that a change in behavior always accompanies genuine faith (saving faith) which is placed in Christ. In essence, all Christians, in some ways, and in varying degrees, manifest a certain amount of transformation, fruit, and good works in their lives (1 John 3:8-9; 5:18).

James insists that works are not an “added extra” to faith, but they are an essential expression of it in the outworking of a believer’s life (not salvation). James insists that a living faith will authenticate itself in the production of works. Works of transformation and new life do follow faith. In other words, all genuine belief in Christ will result in a change of behavior. Belief always behaves.

This truth is illustrated in five ways.

I. Dead faith (James 2:14, 17, 20, 26)

James 2:14

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?”

James is arguing for the importance of a living and dynamic faith that gives evidence in one’s life by the good works a person does. James does not doubt that “faith alone in Christ” is the way of salvation. Instead, he is teaching that a certain kind of faith, a spurious faith, which does not translate into eventual sanctification or transformation of living, is not the type of faith that saves. In other words, James is describing the man who has nothing but a profession of faith. He says he has faith, but there is nothing about his life that indicates it. Can faith save a person that lives like the devil all of his life and shows no signs of fruitfulness and change in his life? No! Why? It’s because this kind of faith was not genuine; instead, it was hypocritical.

So what kind of faith is James specifically talking about? He is referring to a sham or counterfeit faith. He is speaking about a *say-so faith* that is not backed up by any good works (transformed living). Such a faith is worthless. It is all words and nothing else. The walk of this person does not measure up to their talk.

Remember the expression:

“Some people talk the walk while others walk the talk.”

In other words, there is the lip-side of Christianity and the life-side of Christianity. James is referring to a person who claims to be saved but their faith is not real or genuine because of their lack of interest in spiritual things. A faith of words (a profession of salvation) without works (a performance related to godly living)

cannot save simply because that faith was not genuine. In other words, fruit must follow faith in order to make it genuine. If a person truly places their faith in Christ for salvation, then this same faith will be outwardly manifested and evidenced by a change of life and conduct. Where there is life (Eph. 2:8-9) there is also fruit (Eph. 2:10). If the declaration of a person's faith does not follow with a change in his life, he is as phony as a three-dollar bill. Faith is proven to be true by works (performance) and not merely by words (a profession).

The question in James 2:14 could be understood in this way: "Can this kind of faith save him?" James is talking about the kind of faith that is never evidenced through good works and transformation of living. The answer is that this kind of faith, a faith that never changes a man from sinner to saint, can never save a person! A faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false faith. This kind of faith is dead faith.

James 2:17

"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

The famous old western poster reads, "Wanted: Dead or Alive." The same could be true regarding faith. Faith can either be dead or alive. James is not saying that we are saved by faith PLUS works. To hold such a view would dishonor the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we were saved by faith plus works, then there would be two saviors - Jesus and ourselves. James is saying that all true or genuine faith in Christ will result in a person manifesting regenerating works in his life.

William MacDonald stated:

"True faith and works are inseparable. The first produces the second, and the second evidences the first."

A "dead" faith is a faith without works. It is a lifeless faith that never produces the fruit of transformation; therefore, it is a fraudulent type of faith. When a person lacks transformation and change in their life, it proves that their faith in Christ was not genuine. Therefore, this type of faith is deemed as a worthless and workless faith which is not genuine. In other words, all true or genuine faith will eventually manifest itself in fruitful and holy living (Heb. 12:14). Those who place faith in Christ will produce new life in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). All Christians will bear some fruit and change of behavior in their personal lives (John 15:1-7; Matt. 13:23; Gal. 5:22-23).

Don Anderson once said:

“Faith without life-evidence is like an apple tree without apples, a car without wheels, a watch that doesn’t run. True faith, like a living tree, will reveal its life by the kind of fruit that it produces.”

Matthew 7:16-20

“Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Faith and fruit go hand in hand. Good works are the fruits of faith. If a person does not bring forth the fruit of transformation after their salvation experience, then their faith was not genuine. Their faith is lifeless and not real in spite of what people might say. They have profession without possession. Lip service is no proof that one is saved.

It has been well stated:

“There are many professors but few possessors.”

Profession without practice or progress means that there was no genuine faith placed in Christ at the time of one’s alleged salvation. Those who profess to be saved but never get around to living like they are saved have a dead faith. A “dead” faith (James 2:20, 26) that does not produce fruit or signs of life, is a spurious faith (false or sham faith), since it does not result in transformation of living. Therefore, it could not be an expression of genuine or saving faith placed in Christ. It is merely empty profession.

Today, we have a lot of so-called professing Christians, who are members of churches. However, they are nothing but zombies. They are walking around, as if they are alive, but they are really dead and their life betrays their profession.

A person may hear the truth and even say that he believes (“a man may say he hath faith” - James 2:14), but unless the fruits of faith are seen or evidenced in his life, he cannot be saved. Your “saying so” does not make it so!

Matthew 7:21

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

If I say that I have faith, but my life does not correspond to that which I profess, then I cannot be saved. If you fail to live like you are saved, or follow the will of God, then you are a foolish person, who is trying to con yourself and others.

Matthew 7:26 echoes this same truth:

"And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand."

Your life is built on sinking sand if your faith is dead, lifeless, or without works. This is because a lifeless or dead faith is counterfeit. Your original expression of faith in Christ was not real or genuine. Godly behavior coincides with belief. Works substantiate a person's faith and without works a person's alleged saving faith in Christ is not genuine.

We do need to remember that good works might be waiting to happen in the life of one whose faith might be in question. Maybe the changes are incubating and will hatch later through discipleship (Matt. 28:19-20). However, we can be sure that James is teaching that transformation will result in the life of every believer who is born again.

Anderson concludes:

"Salvation does bring change, maybe slowly, maybe imperceptibly at times, but authentic trust will somehow manifest itself in good works and a different lifestyle. ... Good works are the proof in the pudding."

Born again believers do not continually practice sin without ever showing any signs of regenerating life (1 John 3:7-10). Authentic Christianity goes from the head, to the heart, and to the foot. If we have genuinely accepted Christ as Savior, some evidence will show up in our lives. Authentic faith will make a difference in us, somehow, somewhere, and at sometime! There are many people who claim to be Christians whose lives reflect nothing of Christ.

Perhaps one might ask, “How many good works must I do to prove my Christianity? How much is enough?” A Christian who is only trusting in the death of Christ for his salvation will not ask these questions. Therefore, a word of caution must be given at this point. The primary assurance of a person’s salvation and eternal life is based upon faith in God’s promise of eternal life (1 John 5:11-13; John 3:16) and not faith in their performance of living.

We are to look to Christ for the assurance of our salvation (John 1:29; John 3:15-16; Isa 45:22). A person’s assurance is based upon the promise of God’s Word, in relationship to when they “first trusted in Christ” (Eph. 1:12), as their personal Savior (John 1:12; Rom. 10:13). However, a secondary confirmation of a person’s salvation involves the examination of one’s life (2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:10; 1 John 2:3, 9-11; 3:9, 14). Examining one’s life is the result of the assurance we already have in Christ; it is not the basis for our assurance. Furthermore, we must conclude that self-examination does not involve an intricate examination, which tries to compare the ratio of good works to sins, or triumphs to failures in one’s life. It’s a general examination, which results in one knowing that their life has been different, since they have come to faith in Christ.

Something else can be said at this point. It’s not so much the *quantity* of our works that we do, but the *quality* of our life (Gal. 5:22-23), which will eventually reveal that we have come to genuine faith in Christ. The birthmark of a Christian is that they live like a Christian!

II. Distinct illustration (2:15-16)

James 2:15-16

“If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?”

James now gives an illustration to prove his doctrinal thesis that faith in Christ alone will eventually translate into fruitful living. A person may talk (“one of you say”) about extending mercy to someone in need (“Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled”), but then fail to actually extend mercy to them (“give them not those things which are needful to the body”). If this is the case, there is no “profit” in what the person says (Gal. 6:10). That person is all talk and is nothing

but a noisy or “tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). The same is true in relationship to faith and works. A person can say they have faith in Christ; however, in works (the outward expression of good works) they can deny this profession or claim. They are all talk but there is no evidence that they have placed faith in Christ and received a new way of life.

Titus 1:16

“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”

James’ illustration (James 2:15-16) compares faith without works to words of compassion without acts of compassion. One must prove they are compassionate to another person by doing something for them. In a similar way, a person who claims to have faith in Christ, must prove that their faith is genuine, by living out a new way of life, as unto Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

Just suppose that you and your family were stranded in your automobile during a blizzard. The road was drifted shut and no one came to help you. You decided to walk two miles to the nearest house and find help. When you knocked on the door the man of the household said, “My deepest sympathy to all of you. I hope your luck will change.” After these words, he closes the door on your face. He offers you no help, shelter, food, or telephone. What would you think about this man? You would have good reason to doubt his true concern for your welfare, since he did not express any deeds of kindness toward your family.

The same is true regarding those who say or profess that they have faith in Christ but who never give evidence of their faith in Christ through outward transformation or living. James concludes that they cannot possess true salvation and justification before God. Their profession does not line up with their practice. A true faith will result in a working faith. Belief will behave!

III. Distorted thinking (2:18, 20)

James is very clear on the teaching that faith alone in Christ saves a person, but the “faith alone” in Christ that saves will eventually be manifested in outward change. At this point, the epistle sets up a conversation between James and some imaginary objector (“a man may say” – James 2:18) who misunderstands the teaching of James on faith and works.

James calls this person “a vain man” (James 2:20), or a foolish man, since the objector is claiming that James comes to a faulty conclusion and is actually teaching a works-salvation (legalism). James would never contradict the teaching of the Scripture, which declares that a person is saved by grace through faith alone in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9).

James was writing to Jews (James 1:1) who probably abandoned the false teaching of the “works righteousness” of Judaism. However, these same Jews may have embraced the mistaken notion that since righteous works and obedience were not necessary for salvation, they were not necessary at all in relationship to faith and transformation of living.

There has been much debate in the next several verses over where this imaginary objector stops his talking and where James picks up on his response. I will try and give an understanding of the conversation by separating the objector’s words and the words of James as found in 2:18.

In general, an objector could try and bring division between those saints who claim “faith alone in Christ saves without works” and those saints, like James, who teach that “faith alone in Christ saves without works but is always evidenced by works.”

There is a division that exists today between Reformed teaching and what is called “Free Grace” teaching. However, as usual, the truth lies somewhere in between. Let’s break down the dialogue of James 2:18:

The imaginary objector says: “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith...”

This is what the new *Jewish* converts believed, which is to say, faith in Christ alone saves a person, without any meritorious works. It is *the faith alone in Christ alone* position.

The imaginary objector continues to speak “... and I have works”

At this point, he is likely referring to what he thought *James* was teaching, which is a works-salvation, instead of faith in Christ alone for salvation.

James now replies to the objector and the division he is trying to create between the two parties: "...shew me thy faith without thy works"

This is an indication of a sham or counterfeit faith, a faith that was not genuine and real at the time of one's alleged conversion to Christ.

James continues: "and I will shew thee my faith by my works"

This is true faith in Christ, which saves a man and eventually becomes evidenced in a person's transformation of living.

James' conclusion can be summarized in this way: "Some people say they have faith with nothing tangible to back it up. But I can show by the way I live that my faith in Christ is real."

The axiom is worth repeating:

"Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone."

Of course, there are always those who misrepresent what the Bible says and come to extreme positions about faith and works, which do not reflect Biblical teaching. This is an objector who tries to stress that James was teaching salvation by works – a doctrine that was contrary to Pauline teaching. However, in coming to this conclusion, the objector has gone too far. James did not say that works are *essential* to saving faith in Christ at the time of a person's salvation. His argument was that works are *evidence* of all true saving faith later on in life. True faith in Christ will express itself in observable good works ("your work of faith" – 1 Thess. 1:3).

IV. Demonic faith (19-20)

James continues speaking in 2:19 in answering the objector: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

Demons are essentially orthodox in their doctrine (Matt. 8:29, 30; Mark 5:7; Luke 4:41; Acts 19:15). Demons are not atheists. They believe there is only "one God" (monotheism) and shudder at the thought of their accountability to Him. They also believe in the deity of Christ (Matt. 8:29). However, orthodox doctrine by

itself is no proof of saving faith and Roman Catholics and many other denominations with their creeds need to understand this.

With all of their intellectual belief and confession, demons still are not saved. The fact that demons do not live a transformed way of life and surrender to God's will indicates that their intellectual faith is spurious, or false. Therefore, their doctrine is not backed by duty. Their trembling is not backed by transformation. As a result, demons have not proven that their belief or faith is genuine.

Many people today are like the demons. They believe in the general doctrines of the Bible and yet remain unsaved. They possess a "head" faith but not a "heart" faith (Rom. 10:10). Furthermore, their doctrinal beliefs do not translate into duty (transformation of living). James reminds us again that intellectual belief in historic doctrines without transformation of living is a "dead" faith.

Once again, James says, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20). This means, once again, that it is a lifeless faith, which never produces the fruit of transformation; therefore, it is a fraudulent type of faith. A person's faith in Christ is fictional. It is a faith that is eventually demonstrated to be counterfeit because of a lack of fruitfulness and sanctification.

V. Defending examples (2:21-26)

James now gives some examples that will defend his teaching about faith and works. True saving faith (faith alone in Christ) is eventually evidenced through sanctification. Belief always behaves! Here are the examples.

a. The example of Abraham (James 2:21-24)

1. The proof of faith (works)

James 2:21

"Was not Abraham our father justified by works (in the sense that works give proof or evidence before others that a person is justified in God's presence), when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?"

Please note that this text does NOT say that Abraham was justified by works back in Genesis chapter 12 which was the time when he was saved. A thousand times no! Abraham was justified by works later on in his life when he offered Isaac on the altar. His actual justification occurred back in Genesis 12, the time when his adventure of faith began (Gen. 15:6).

This leaves us with a question. In what way was Abraham justified “when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?” Abraham offered Isaac on the altar in Genesis 22. The answer to our question is simple. Abraham’s works justified him in the sense that they validated and confirmed his faith in God as being genuine and real; therefore, his faith, since it was genuine, had resulted in him receiving a righteous standing before God. In other words, Abraham was *justified by works* before Isaac when he gave evidence of his obedient faith.

James 2:22 adds these words:

“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works (after salvation) was faith made perfect?”

James is once again talking about the type of faith that results in transformation of living. All true faith results in a change of behavior. In other words, when Abraham obeyed God, his faith reached its intended goal (“perfect”) of obedience and sanctification. The sacrifice of Abraham’s son was the crowning point of his obedient faith. Therefore, his *obedient* faith (evidenced before others) became the *proof* of his justifying faith before God. Abraham’s obedience proved or substantiated the genuine character of his faith, which in return, verified that Abraham had already been justified before God through faith alone.

2. The root of justification (faith)

James 2:23 concludes:

“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.”

James adds these words to prove that Abraham had *already* been justified back in Genesis 12 when he believed God’s Abraham Covenant promise.

Abraham's justification took place at the time of his initial faith in God's promise (Genesis 12). However, the proof of his justification took place when he offered Isaac (Genesis 22).

James begins with the proof of Abraham's justification before God (offering Isaac - James 1:21-22) to verify the root of justification (Abraham's faith in God's promise – James 2:23).

Yes, Abraham was justified by works (James 2:21). However, his works were NOT the *ground* (basis) of his justification before God (Rom. 5:9) but the *proof* of his justification before God. There is a difference! Once again, James is not referring to the way of justification before God (which is only by faith) but to the proof of one's justification before God which is manifested by obedience to God (Heb. 11:17-19). James is not concluding that works *make* us righteous before God, but works *show* that we are righteous before God. Works illustrate our faith. They visibly manifest what we believe. Belief is still the essential element. Nevertheless, belief does behave.

James 2:23 once again reads:

"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."

This is a quotation from Genesis 15:6 (which is looking back to Genesis 12) and it categorically denies that James was teaching salvation by works (Romans 4:3-5). Abraham simply believed God's revelation and was justified. James agrees with Paul that justification (imputed righteousness and legal acquittal before God) is based upon faith alone in Christ alone (Gal. 2:16). In fact, Abraham was legally acquitted before God and declared righteous, through faith, before he had performed any spiritual works. How do I know this? Genesis 12 comes before Genesis 22!

The point James is making in this verse is that when Abraham obeyed God, he gave proof of his justification before God, on the basis of his works, which seven chapters later in the book of Genesis were evidenced by his obedience. God knows no justification in His sight which is not eventually evidenced or confirmed by sanctification and obedience. In fact, James brings this out in the next verse.

James 2:24

"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

Once again, a person is justified by works *before others* as they witness that person's transformed manner of living. When James says, "not by faith only" he is NOT denying that faith in Christ is all that is needed for justification before God and salvation from hell (Romans 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16; 3:11, 24). What he is referring to is that you cannot know there is true and genuine justification unless there is a change or transformation in character. There MUST be fruit evidenced in a person's life for a person's salvational faith to be real.

Matthew 13:8

"But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold."

James continues his argument with the imaginary objector (James 2:24) and once again refers to the *proof* of justification – not the *means* of justification before God which is by faith alone. In other words, a person's justification before God is confirmed by his works. In summary, people are *justified before God by faith* but they are *justified by works* before others.

Taking the entire argument of James in its context, we can conclude that works do justify a person, but only in the sense that they prove or validate a person's justification before God. Works in and of themselves have nothing to do with initial faith in Christ and the conversion experience (Eph. 2:8-9).

Works FOLLOW faith (Eph. 2:10) but they are not PART of faith or when a person trusts in Christ. In other words, if we have been justified before God by faith (James 2:23), then our justification before God will be confirmed by good works or transformation of living (James 2:24). Our belief in Christ will eventually translate in behavior that is like Christ.

b. The example of Rahab (2:25)

James 2:25 declares:

"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works(in the sense that works give proof or evidence before others that a person is justified in God's presence) , when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?"

Rahab saved the lives of God's servants and gave proof that she was justified before God (Heb. 11:31). She was "justified by works" in the sense that God validated and confirmed her justified position before the presence of others when she desired to follow His ways. Once again, people are *justified before God by faith* but they are *justified by works* before others. Abraham sacrificed his son, Rahab helped the spies, and Noah built an ark. All of these Old Testament figures confirmed their justification before God through their outward acts of obedience. Viable faith always becomes visible faith.

Justification before God is *based* on the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:9) but it's *confirmed* through transformed living (2 Pet. 1:10). This is what James is talking about in all of these verses. The works that result from placing faith in Christ are not the *cause* of our salvation but the *effect* of our salvation. James is talking about the effect that true justification before God has upon our lives. Again, if we have been justified before God by faith (James 2:23), then our justification before God will be validated or confirmed by good works, or transformation of living (James 2:25). Faith is always proven by works and not merely by words. Belief behaves!

c. The example of the human body (2:26)

James 2:26

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

Faith and deeds (works) are essential to each other even as the body needs the human spirit to be alive. When the body dies the spirit leaves the body and goes to the place of its choosing. A body that does not possess a human spirit is lifeless and dead. It is good for nothing. A corpse does not possess any signs of life. It has no visible heartbeat or movement.

In a similar way, faith that does NOT translate into transformation of living is a dead faith. This means it is without life, since it does not give any signs or evidences of fruit, which in return proves that it is a spurious or counterfeit faith. To state succinctly, faith without works is like a dead body in a morgue. It has no sign of life and validity. It's not genuine. We know there is life in a body, when it is breathing or moving, and we know that faith is alive, when we see it acting. Belief always behaves.

A minister once talked to a man who professed conversion, and he asked, "Have you united with the church?" "No, I haven't," the man replied. "The dying thief never united with the church, and he went to heaven." The minister asked, "Have you ever sat at the Lord's table?" "No, the dying thief never did, and he was accepted" was the answer.

The minister went on to ask, "Have you been baptized?" "No," he said, "the dying thief was never baptized, and he went to heaven." "Have you given to missions?" "No, the dying thief did not give to missions, and he was not judged for it" was the reply. The disgusted minister then said to the man, "Well, my friend, the difference between you two seems to be that he was a dying thief and you are a living thief."

This man demonstrated that his faith was not real because he wanted to rob God. The Scriptures speak for themselves: "faith without works is dead" (James 2:20). Paul concludes, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves ..." (2 Cor. 13:5).

We can conclude that James never taught salvation was through works but that works are the evidence and confirmation of one's salvation. The epistle of James is not a "straw epistle" as Luther imagined. It is an epistle that deals with a belief that behaves. All genuine belief in Christ will eventually result in a new behavior of life. You can't have one without the other. Right belief produces right behavior that "becometh saints" (Eph. 5:3). Titus 3:8 reminds us "that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works."

D.L. Moody often said:

"Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather."

Moody did not say this because he had been a successful shoe salesman; he said this because he was a Christian. Every Christian who is born again will manifest some Bible in their everyday lifestyle. If the Bible and transformation does not show up in their life, somehow, somewhere, and at sometime, then their faith in Christ is not genuine. This is the message of James chapter two.

It is also said that D. L. Moody was once accosted on a Chicago Street by a drunk who exclaimed, “Aren’t you Mr. Moody? Why, I’m one of your converts.” Said Moody in reply, “That must be true, for you surely aren’t one of the Lord’s!”

The Gospel promises not only forgiveness of sins but also new life (“newness of the Spirit” - Rom. 7:6). There will be signs of life in every born-again believer (1 John 2:3, 3:7, 9, 14). We might label these new signs the birthmarks of the Christian life. This new life will be evidenced in transformation of living where a person will be “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).