***Saving Faith vs. Works
Romans 15:30-33
RO194-02***

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Paul's Appeal for Prayer Support, Segment Number 9. Our topic is covering Romans 15:30-33.

**Acceptance vs. Commitment**

The current theological debate between Free Grace Salvation and Lordship Salvation, which we have been studying, deals with the question of personal assurance that one is saved and definitely destined for eternal life in Heaven. At issue is what constitutes saving faith with God which secures salvation definitely for the sinner. Free Grace Salvation says that salvation is an act of appropriation. And that's the key word, appropriation, that is accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as one's Savior on the basis of His atoning work on the cross. On the other side of the fence, Lordship Salvation says that salvation is an act of commitment. And that's the key word there, commitment, trusting in Jesus Christ but also making Him Lord by repenting of one's sinful ways and committing oneself to obedience to Him.

I was listening to the late Dr. J. Vernon McGee on the radio this week, and he was talking about this issue of salvation. At one point he said "Salvation from God is a grace gift. And you do not add to that your church membership, your water baptism, your good works or any promises." I thought, 'there it is.' He put it well.

Salvation is a free grace gift from God with no promises demanded upfront. Lordship Salvation says, "Oh no, you have to trust in Christ, but it's not real faith if you don't promise to behave yourself after you're a Christian."

The gospel of John we have shown you was written to explain what constitutes saving faith. John in his gospel never uses the word repentance, let alone makes it part of saving faith. He just doesn't deal with the subject. And yet, here's a book that God the Holy Spirit says, 'I have written to show you explicitly how to go to Heaven.' The gospel of John always describes saving faith as trusting in Jesus Christ alone for salvation, receiving a free grace gift.

Making Christ Lord of one's life is the result of growth in spiritual maturity after salvation. It is not part of the saving process. The idea of repentance in the Bible basically relates to creating a state of harmony between the sinner and God. This harmony relates to salvation by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ; we call that eternal fellowship, or the Outer Circle. There is also the harmony of sanctification through the confession of known sins; we call that the inner circle of temporal fellowship. Thus, there can be no true repentance by the sinner apart from believing on Jesus Christ, because you are trying to create harmony between yourself and God, either unto salvation or onto your daily walk in fellowship. That harmony can only be achieved by believing the Word of God and thereby turning from sin, repenting from your evil, whether you are whether you are a Christian or whether you are an unbeliever coming to the Christian life. Repentance is not a separate fact from believing.

In 1 Thessalonians 1:9 we have this illustrated. Paul says, "For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God." Now, that's a demonstration, that's an explanation of repentance: "you turned to God from your idols to serve a living and true God." In other words, you change your mind. Why did you do that? Well, because you believe that what you were doing was wrong and that you believe that trusting in Christ as Savior was the thing to do. So, you cannot repent without at the same time believing; it's 2 sides of the same coin. Repentance really comes into the experience of a person after he is a Christian. It is the constant factor in the born-again person's life. His Sin Nature is always leading him into evil, and our repentance is expressed by our confession to the Father.

Saving faith, we indicated, is compared in the Bible to a once-for-all drink of the water of life. It is compared in the Bible to being born into the family of God and so, it's an irreversible process. A saved person, on occasion we have shown you, like in the case of John the Baptist, can question Jesus Christ, can have weakened faith in Christ, can wonder if you are really saved. But none of those doubts on your part can cause a genuine salvation to be reversed. Jesus Christ is true to his promise to save us on the basis of His own merit.

Lordship Salvation, you see, focuses a person's attention on his own performance instead of on the Lord Jesus Christ. Your eyes are focused on yourself instead of on Christ. So, you're always looking to see how well you're doing in your life, how well you're living your life, and your eyes are on yourself and not on the Lord. You're not occupied with Christ and His total sufficiency to meet your temporal and eternal needs. What you're doing is looking at your own virtues for assurance of salvation, and that is a very subjective basis. A lot of people have conned themselves on that very basis that they're as good as the next person and therefore they are going to Heaven, and they feel quite confident that God will accept them. Looking to your own virtues for salvation will never give you confidence that you are saved. The inevitable expressions of your Old Sin Nature are going to preclude you having any peace about salvation. And that you remember at the end of Romans 15, that was our jumping off point, Paul commending these believers in his closing remarks to them, to the peace of God. You cannot have peace with God. When you are basing your salvation on your lifestyle and your performance, you will always disappoint yourself. So, how sinful and disobedient can you be and still go to Heaven? Looking to your own works, to your own piety to confirm your salvation is always going to result in disappointment, in defeat and in despair.

**The Book of James' Discussion of Works**

I know that some of you have been wondering, having said all this, how the Book of James fits in to all of this. So, we are going to turn this morning to the Book of James because this is what is going to be thrown up to you as proof that works confirm salvation. And as a matter of fact, Lordship Salvation people make a great deal of the Book of James as proving their point that if you do not make Christ Lord, you cannot make Him Savior; the 2 have to go together.

**To Whom Is James Written?**

First of all, I think we can fairly ask the question to whom is James writing this letter? Is he speaking to believers or to unbelievers? Let's take a look! In James 1:2, "Consider it all joy, my brethren." When he uses the word "brethren," to whom is he speaking? Well, obviously, right from the very first, he has indicated that he is addressing people who are born again.

Verse 16 of Chapter 1, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."

Chapter 2, verse 1, "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." Now it's wrong for a Christian to act like that, personal favoritism, treating people differently on whether they wear fine clothes or not-so-fine clothes, whether they're rich or whether they're poor. That's a sinful way for a Christian to treat another person. You see, this is a sinning Christian, 'My brethren don't do things like that.'

Verse 5 of Chapter 2, "Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith" and so on.

Verses 14-15, "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is clothing and in need of daily food." Here again, he's addressing brethren. In verse 14, He brings in some kind of a faith that is confirmed by works, some kind of a faith that results in some kind of saving.

Chapter 3 verse 1, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren."

Chapter 3 verse 10, "from the same mouth come forth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way." From whose mouth? From the mouths of these Christian brethren that he's writing to. These are the people who are swearing and saying things, talking the way they should not as Christians.

Verse 12, "Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can saltwater produce fresh." So, here again, inconsistencies in the Christian life.

James 4:11, "Do not speak against one another, brethren." Don't act as judge over your fellow Christians.

Chapter 5 verse 7, "Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord."

Verse 9 and 10, "Do not complain, brethren, against one another, ... As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience."

Verse 12, "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth."

Verse 19-20, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins." Now, verse 19 addresses "brethren." Dr. MacArthur, who has promulgated the position of Lordship Salvation, says that these last 2 verses of James apply to an unbeliever. Do you think that that sounds like he's talking to an unbeliever when he says, "My brethren," after the way he's talked to brethren throughout this book, if any of you strays from the truth? Now, the reason they're saying that this is unbeliever, is because Christians aren't supposed to stray from the truth. And if you turn him back, he's a sinner. (Christians aren't supposed to be sinners. Christians aren't supposed to have error of their ways.) And they're going to save their soul (And that should be translated life.) from death. What kind of death are you going to save them from? Well, certainly you can save a Christian from bearing the sin-unto-death. There's a lot of Christians who die prematurely and it's God's judgment of sin-unto-death. You get a Christian back on track and off his sinning, and you may save his physical life. And you will cover, by bringing him back to repentance, you will cover a multitude of his sins.

You see, all this makes sense when you see that James is writing to brethren.

**James Calls Readers to Repentance But Not Salvation**

There are certain other things that you will observe in this book. James never calls his readers to salvation, but many times he calls his readers to give up their worldly ways.

For example, in James 1:21, he says, "Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." And here again, this word translated "souls" is this Greek word "psuche," p s u c h e. And this word "psuche" means "life." Now, it does refer to your soul as life, but it is better to understand that he is talking about you as a living person, saving your life. You know what happens in death, don't you? The soul leaves the body. Your life, in the form of your soul, departs. "Psuche" should be better translated as "life" to give you a little better picture of what he's talking about.

So, he's never calling these people to be saved. And if he were, he certainly shouldn't be telling them "Clean up your life." Do you understand from Scriptures, from a verse like John 3:16, that the way to get to Heaven is to clean up your life and then trust in Jesus Christ, clean up your life to express your change of mind, your repentance about your sin? Of course not. An unsaved person can't clean up his life. He can do no good before God. So, it is clear that James is not calling on anybody to be saved, but he is certainly calling on people to get their lives straightened out spiritually. That can only fit Christians.

**James is About Temporal Fellowship and Rewards**

Furthermore, James warns his readers about living out of temporal fellowship, which indeed could lead to their physical deaths. James 1:15 says, "Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. The same concept is in 1 John 5:16 about the sin-unto-death.

So, James warns these Christians that living out of temporal fellowship consistently may bring about your death. This is not a new idea. This was a principle in the Old Testament as well. You keep living outside of the will of God, you keep living in persistent willful sin and you know it, the time will come when you may expect to see your life snuffed out by God and you will be taken home to Heaven. Proverbs 10:27 indicates "The fear of the LORD prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened." Isn't that clear? The fear of the LORD, Godly living, obedience to God will extend your lifespan. But the years of the wicked will be shortened.

Proverbs 11:19, same principle, "He who is steadfast in righteousness will attain to life, And he who pursues evil will bring about his own death." How could you say it more clearly than that?

Proverbs 12:28, same thing, "In the way of righteousness is life, And in its pathway there is no death."

Proverbs 13:14, "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, To turn aside from the snares of death." The teachings of the wise, that is God's wisdom, will turn you aside from the snares of death.

One more, Proverbs 19:16, the same principle, obedience to the Word of God preserves your physical life. "He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, [And there it is again, the same idea is life, your soul life.] But he who is careless of his ways will die."

So, when James is talking to these readers, warning them about living in disobedience to God, he's not talking to unbelievers; he is talking to Christians who will suffer the consequences of that kind of negative volition to the Word of God.

**James' Readers Have a Right to Pray to God**

Furthermore, James refers to the fact that his readers have a right to pray to God; unbelievers do not have a right to pray to God. James 5:16, "Therefore, confess your sins [acknowledge your shortcomings] to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." The prayer of a Christian in temporal fellowship, when it is used, will accomplish a great deal. But that can only be spoken to Christians.

In James Chapter 3, an extended passage, verses 1-12, James warns these people about how they use their tongues. You're telling falsehoods, you're slandering people, you're misrepresenting. You're using your tongue like a sewer. To whom is he speaking? Well, he's already established, I'm talking to Christians. Christians can do things like that? You bet.

**James Differentiates Christian Conduct**

In James 3:13 he says that his readers are capable of showing divine viewpoint wisdom in their conduct. James 3:13, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." If you understand the Word of God, you will know how to act.

James 3:14-16 describes the way of a carnal Christian, while James 3:17-18 that of a Christian, but that of a spiritual Christian. But both are believers! James 3:14-16, "But if you [Christians] have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. [Admit what you're doing and what you are.] This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing." Then he switches to talk about the spiritual Christian. [Starting at verse 17.] "But the wisdom from above is first pure [Talking about divine viewpoint wisdom, it's pure.], then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." So, there you have a dramatic contrast of 2 kinds of Christians, because he's talking to brethren in this book.

One more evidence, James warns his readers against failing to live their lives so as to produce divine good works. In James 2:15-16 he says, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" And his point is that you as a Christian are to produce the divine good that needs to be done for any individual human being.

Now, he wouldn't talk like that to unsaved people. Unbelievers are not called upon to be producing divine good works.

**The Main Point of the Book of James**

So, what's the main point of the Book of James? The basic principle that James stresses is that a Christian should obey the Bible doctrine that he has been taught by his pastor-teacher. The main thing that James is talking about is obey the truth you have been taught. James 1:22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

There is a great delusion within the Christian community: if I go to church, if I am instructed in the Word of God, if I learn the doctrinal principles, that is going to carry me with God even though I don't live up to what I've learned, even though I don't obey, even though I drag my feet, even though I have great reservations, even though I keep putting away into the future when I'm going to get with it and do these great things that are my opportunity to do. You see, this is the problem of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus and to this day, the Jews had the Word of God. It was explicitly spelled out to them how they should live and how they should act. And they made the mistake of thinking that having known those things, having been exposed to the truth, that's all they needed, even though they did not live according to those principles. The fact that they were Jews, they claimed, was going to take them to Heaven.

On a Donahue program one time that was dealing with the business of being born-again, (not one of his favorite topics, but the subject of the program was being born-again,) people were getting hotter and hotter in that audience as the person who was on the panel knew what he was talking about and says, "The Bible says not everybody is going to Heaven. Most people are not going to Heaven. Only those who are spiritually regenerated by trusting in Jesus Christ as personal Savior are going to Heaven. That's what the Bible says. That's what it means by being born-again." And finally, Donahue went up to one woman and she stood up and pointed her finger at the person on the panel and said, "I'm a Jewess and I'm going to Heaven." I said, "No, you ain't, not if you believe what as a Jewess you would normally be expected to believe, you're not going to Heaven." What did she mean by that? She meant the fact that I'm born into the Jewish community places me under the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant. But the Abrahamic covenant was only to those who, like Abraham, trusted in the coming Messiah Savior to cover his sin. The Bible is very clear that Abraham believed God's promise to send a Savior and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Not that Abraham kept all these rituals, in fact, the apostle Paul, you remember said 'When was Abraham saved, before he entered God's covenant through the right of circumcision, or was he saved when he was outside that religious ritual?' And Paul says, 'You know very well he was saved before any act of circumcision was performed.' Therefore, there could be no connection with Abraham's salvation and his human works, or his place within the covenant of God given to the Jewish people.

The main point of the Book of James is 'Folks, don't count on the fact that you have been taught well the doctrines of Scripture that that's going to carry you through. You must now take what you know and start living accordingly.'

This problem is described in the next 2 verses, James 1:23-24, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was." James says it's a common failure, like somebody who looks in the mirror and then walks away and forgets what he looks like. He walks in to the mirror and he sees he's got a dirty nose and smudges on his face. But instead of cleaning up, he walks away, and now he doesn't see it anymore. You know, try looking at a smudge on your face. You can't do that. And he says this is how people are: they look in the mirror of God's word, they see themselves, 'Yeah,' they walk away, they don't clean up the smudge. This is a common failure among Christians.

What James is concerned about in his book is all of these do-nothing loose-living Christians with their dead orthodoxy. They have a creed of beliefs, but it don't mean a thing when it comes to their lives. Christians who talk God but who live like the devil are in view in the Book of James.

Blessings, James says, come from obeying doctrine rather than from ignoring it. So, in James 1:25 he says, "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty [What he means by the law of liberty is the New Testament principle of Free Grace Salvation.], and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does." He didn't say 'this man who lives the doctrine he knows will be the man who is saved.' He's already saved. What he's concerned about is blessings as a saved person. He is very clear that the person who obeys doctrine is the person who is blessed, not just the one who has learned it as important as that is.

**The Problem the Book of James Deals With**

So, James is dealing with the problem of a Christian not living up to the doctrinal principles that he knows. The result is that a Christian who does that will ruin and waste his life, in what way? Not in terms of his salvation, but in terms of storing treasures in Heaven. The readers of James give one the impression that they had fervent testimonies to the wonders of the truth of doctrine but knowing that doctrine did not lead them to be obedient so as not to waste their lives out of the inner circle of temporal fellowship. Merely professing faith in Jesus Christ and having enthusiasm for the Word of God is not enough to give you a meaningful life and an enriched eternity. Our enriched eternity is a direct result of our obedience to doctrine and the accompanying production of Divine Good works through the filling of the Holy Spirit. The doctrinally Orthodox believer, James says, must activate his faith through his divine good works in God's service.

**The Problematic Misinterpretation of James 2:14-26**

The crucial problem area is James 2:14-26. We're going to look at this in some detail.

Since James is writing to believers in Jesus Christ (And I hope I've established that for you, the way he calls them brethren.), the things he calls upon them to do could only apply to Christians. Since we can accept that he is writing to believers, then whatever this Scripture here says Chapter 2, verses 14-26, it cannot be dealing with salvation in reference to the Lake of Fire. He cannot be talking to Christians about how to be saved. And you would get that idea in many churches because people come to church, they are Christians, and the only message they hear is a variation of the gospel, because the preacher is interested in building up membership not in feeding his flock. And you would get the impression that Christians have to be told the gospel again and again.

**Scripture Does Not Contradict Other Scripture**

While we're dealing with saved people in this book, he's talking about some kind of salvation. But, if they're saved, whatever this salvation is, it is not from the Lake of Fire. Furthermore, since God the Holy Spirit has guided James in the writing of his book, you know that he cannot contradict some other part of the Scriptures. You know that James cannot contradict Paul's clear teachings of justification by faith in Christ, apart from any human works or any promises to behave yourself.

In James 2:14 we read, "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" This saving that he speaks of here cannot be some kind of salvation that is secured by faith plus one's good works because that would contradict Ephesians 2:8:9 that says it's not by works! It would contradict Romans 11:6 which says if it's of works it's not grace, and God only saves by grace.

You have the same thing in James 2:17, "But so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." This cannot be saying that you are saved by faith in Christ plus your good works as Lordship Salvation suggests.

The Holy Spirit is consistent and truthful in the Books of the Bible. James could not contradict Paul's statement to the Philippians jailer when the jailer says, "How do I go to heaven?" "Believe, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." Both James and Paul in fact, view faith in Jesus Christ as the only requirement for salvation.

We are clear about that. We've read that many times. Paul, for example, in Romans 5:1-2, Paul makes it clear that salvation is by grace as a gift from God. Romans 5:1-2, Paul says, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God." A clear statement, Paul says, 'I'm going to heaven. I'm in this grace of salvation, I have a hope for eternal glory. [And remember that the word hope means something which is certainly going to happen.] I have that definitely as a result of something that God has done for me.'

That's the same thing that James is saying in James 1:17-18, where James is saying, "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above." And this expression "from above" here uses the Greek word "anothen," a n o t h e n, and "anothen" means "from above" or it is translated sometimes "born-again." It is the identical word that was used to Nicodemus in John 3:7 where Jesus says you must be born again, you must be born "anothen," from above. You must be born "spiritually" is the meaning. So here, James is clearly bouncing back to the word "from above" relative to a gift from God. He is talking about a gift [resuming in James 1:17] "coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures." We are the first fruits, along with Christ of all those through the ages who are to be saved. So, James is talking about God doing something for us, just like Paul is talking about God doing something for us. It is based on a spiritual birth from above. So, James has no disagreement with Paul's revelation from God about Free Grace Salvation. If that were the case, you understand that this book would not be in the Bible.

James 2:23, "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.' and he was called the friend of God." That is a pure Free Grace Salvation statement. James has the same viewpoint about how to go to Heaven that Paul does. That doesn't answer all these questions as to what James means by faith without works is dead and so on. I'm trying to take you step by step to show you that he's talking to Christians, and he is treating them as Christians. He is describing evils that characterize Christians, and these particular ones that he was writing to, and that he talks about going to Heaven on the basis of something that God, in whom there is no deceit, does in our behalf to make us part of the first fruits of the resurrection, He who saves us by His own grace. So that whatever James means by these words, he does not mean that you go to Heaven on the basis of faith in Christ plus making Him Lord of Your Life.

**The Interpretation of James 2:14**

**Who Is James Talking To?**

The Interpretation, James 2:14. Verse 14 says, "What use is it my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" This verse indicates that one can have a faith which does not save a person. And the way this is worded in the Greek Bible, it indicates to us that the answer to this question is "no." The way we would translate it is "That faith can't save him, can it?" The Greek makes it clear what the answer should be. "What use it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, that is faith in Christ, but he has no works? That faith can't save him, can it?" The non-saving faith here is such, he says, because it is not accompanied by good works.

This question applies specifically to a person that James has been describing in the previous context. He has been talking about a Christian who has been committing some very serious sins. This Christian knows doctrine, but he doesn't obey it. Thus, he has in view a Christian who needs to be admonished to express his profession of faith in Christ with his good works. Now, you and I understand that. We have known Christians who on the one hand profess faith in Jesus Christ. They sit here in church, and they listen to the Word of God and they sing the hymns, and then they walk out of here and live in the worst kind of evil activities. They are not living up to their profession. They are deceitful. They are covering up. They are living in evil. James says there is something wrong with a Christian who professes salvation and then lives in violation of the Word of God.

Since the Word of God teaches a Free Grace Salvation apart from works, which we have shown James also preaches, the "saving" in verse 14 cannot be "saving from the Lake of Fire." That faith, that kind of faith, can't save him. Save him from what? If any human work or promise of obedience is offered to God along with trusting in Christ for salvation, then salvation cannot be a free grace gift from God. Please take the trouble to jot down Romans 4:1-17 and read that at your leisure. There, Paul deals with the issue of how Abraham was saved, and he makes it clear that Abraham was saved by a free grace act of God apart from Abraham's religious ritual circumcision or anything else. Abraham trusted God to cover his sins through a Savior who was to come. If any human work or promise had been added to that, Paul says it couldn't have been by grace, then Abraham would have been entitled to it by works. In that section, it makes it very clear you cannot contribute anything to your salvation or it's not a free gift. Salvation from the Lake of Fire is never secured by your good works. Nor are your good works a proof that you are saved, because the best of your good works can also be done by unbelievers.

**The Context of James 2:14**

So, the word "save" in James 2:14 has to go back to something in the context, and that is referring back to James 1:21. In James 1:21, he sets the pattern for what he's talking about: the final phrase, which is "able to save your souls." 'Putting aside all filthiness and all that remains in wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, be a doer of the doctrine you've learned, which is able to save your souls,' meaning your life. So, when he talks about 'can that faith save him,' what's he talking about? In the context of this book, it is clear that he is talking about saving in terms of preserving the potential of your life on earth for earning eternal rewards through Christian service instead of forever wasting your life and pursuing only temporal things. He is dealing with not wasting your life on earth through living in carnality so that you do not produce any service to God.

This same idea is expressed in Luke 6:9. Let me give you a couple of important illustrations. Luke 6:9, "And Jesus said to them, 'I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do harm, to save a life, or to destroy it?'" Guess what the word is here for "life," "psuche." The same one that has been translated as "soul" in James, here you have it translated in its real meaning of "life." It's exactly the same word. Now you see, it's very easy for you to understand what Jesus is saying, to save a life, to preserve a life.

You have this same idea in Mark 3:4. Mark 3:4 says, "And He said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?' But they kept silent." And here, the word "life" again is the same word "psuche" that sometimes is translated "soul."

So, it's very clear that James when he uses this word "psuche," he is not talking about a spiritual regeneration. He is talking about preserving your physical life, your breathing in and your breathing out. Only the Christian who is a doer of the Word of God can walk in that inner circle of temporal fellowship so that his life is lived profitably in God's will and producing divine good production. Faith in Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior does not eliminate your need to obey the Word of God if you expect to preserve the value of your life. So, in James 2:14, James says what good is it if somebody says, "Oh yes, I trust in Christ as Savior," and he really does, but he has no life of divine good service. He's out there pursuing only the temporal things. He's out there violating the principles of the Word of God. He's into immorality in all kinds of things. Yes, he's a Christian. But can that kind of faith save him, not in terms of saving him from the Lake of Fire, we've established that, but saving him in terms of what, in terms of what he's talking about in this whole book, making your life on earth count for rewards in Heaven.

**Useless Faith, In What Respect?**

James 2:15-16 says, "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" Here he illustrates this idea of being a doer of what you profess to believe. Here is a person who believes that a fellow Christian who is in need of clothing and food really does need that clothing and food. And instead of coming to his help, he believes that this person should have clothing and food, but instead he makes a sign of the cross, and he says, 'Lord bless you. I'm going to pray for you, that you'll get some clothing and food as you walk out into this snowstorm with your empty stomach.' 'Do you believe that this Christian needs clothing and food?' 'You bet I do.' 'You think he should be helped?' 'Oh, I certainly do.' 'God bless you, brother.' James says that kind of action is exactly the thing that the Word of God condemns. That indifferent response shows that your belief is not producing the fruit of Christian service that God wants, that your belief toward this person's need is not producing the fruit of loving compassion in his case.

So, what good is that kind of belief? Do you think that God is going to bless you and honor you and prosper you on Earth and in Heaven for that kind of belief just because you believe this person should be helped, but you don't raise your hand to do it? James says, 'That's what I'm talking about.'

Verse 17, he draws the conclusion from this illustration. "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." Faith in Jesus Christ as Savior which does not produce divine good service is dead in the sense that it is inactive in terms of earning rewards from God as treasures stored in Heaven. See how important it is for you to understand that James is talking to Christians, that James is recognizing that Christians have a Sin Nature and they perform evil, that Christians are to be productive in their Christian lives and not to permit sin and evil to undermine that productivity, so that in verse 17, you can read something like this without getting all upset to thinking that he's talking about salvation from the Lake of Fire, you understand that in this context, he's made it clear he's talking about saving the value of your life on earth in terms of eternal blessings.

Even so faith, faith in Christ, genuine born-again faith in Christ, if it does not produce good works, is dead. It is an inactive faith. Doesn't mean you don't have faith. It doesn't mean you're not saved. It means it is inactive, it is unproductive. James is not talking about adding good works to faith in Christ for salvation. Nor is he suggesting that good works will prove that you are saved. He uses the word dead to describe a Christian's faith in Christ, which is unproductive of divine good service.

Compare this to a human body. You easily understand that a dead person is unproductive. A dead person is inactive. A dead person doesn't do anything. That's the kind of death that James is referring to.

**Even Demons Believe**

James 2:18-19, "But someone may well say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." These 2 verses is an imagined objector. James now addresses someone who comes in and says, 'No, you're wrong, James. There is no close connection with God between my faith in Christ and my human works. There's no close connection.' This man argues that 'you can't take your faith and show me your works.' And he says, 'I can't take my works and show you my genuine faith in Christ.' He says, 'There's no connection.' Then he says, 'I'll prove it to you. Men and demons both believe that there's only one God in existence. Yet what does that belief produce, the same reaction? No different reactions. The demons shudder in fear, but they do not subject themselves to God. The person who is a believer knows there is one God, and he subjects himself joyfully to God. So, his point is, here's one person who believes there's only one God and this person is in cringing fear. Does that prove what he believes? There's another person that believes there's one God and he is happy and joyful and subject to that God. Does that prove that he believes in one God? He says they can both believe in one God, but their works, their expressions are totally different. This objector says, "You can't prove anything by how you live and how you act.

Verse 20, James said, "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" He calls the objectors argument foolishness in trying to argue that works do not indicate something about one's faith in Christ. He reiterates that saving faith in Jesus Christ can be useless! How? If it's saving faith, it can't be useless in terms of going to Heaven. But it can't be useless in terms of rewards in Heaven. James insists that without works, the objector's faith is dead and then he shows why, because he's trying to separate faith and works in the Christian experience. James says, 'You're wrong. You cannot separate what you do from reflecting what you believe. And what you believe is going to be productive of certain responses.'

So, in verses 21-23, he uses the illustration of Abraham. He says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,' and [Notice!] he was called the friend of God." Abraham was justified unto salvation in God's sight by his faith in God's promise to bring a Messiah Savior. But James indicates that there is another justification or vindication in the sight of man. That's what he means when he says in verse 21, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac?" There was a certain justification by the work of Abraham.

**Two Kinds of Justification**

And in verse 24, when he says, "That a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone," the word "alone" modifies that whole "and not by faith alone" statement. What he is saying by the word alone is that there are 2 kinds of justifications, one by faith and one by works. There's a justification by a Christian's works as well as by his faith in Christ. There is no such thing, however, in the Bible of justification by faith in Christ and by your works.

What he means by this illustration is that Abraham's obedience to God and his godly lifestyle was the proper expression of one who is in fact in the position of being the friend of God. Verse 22, in the case of Abraham's faith in Christ unto Salvation was made mature by his divine good works and Godly living. We grow in spiritual maturity when we are active in God's service. The little dried-up prunes among us as Christians are the people who are never serving the Lord in any capacity. The faith in Christ which justifies the sinner unto salvation, can also have an active role in his lifestyle, justifying him before people and maturing him spiritually. Faith in Christ is nourished and strengthened, you see, by your divine good works.

**The Friend of God**

Now supposing Abraham had not obeyed and taken Isaac out there to sacrifice him? He still would have been saved because he was saved already, Genesis 5:6 tells us by his faith in God's promise. But what would have happened is that Abraham, in refusing to have works compatible with his claim, a profession of faith in God to save him, what would have happened is that Abraham would not have been called a friend of God. Abraham's works demonstrated, you see, that he had a great intimacy with God because of his obedience. This is the same thing that John 15:14 said. Jesus says, 'If you obey me, I'm going to call you my friends.' That's an expression of being a very close, intimate person.

In Romans 4:19-21 we have this reference to Abraham's faith in God's promise to send a Savior, and that he was going to be saved no matter what. The problem was that Abraham was so old! Problem was that his wife was so old. But Romans 4:19-21 said Abraham believed that God was going to come through no matter what. And Hebrews 11:17 & 19 tells us what was in Abraham's mind when he brought the knife down to kill Isaac. Abraham, in his mind, knew that only Isaac could fulfill the promise of God, but because he trusted in Christ, the Christ to come, because he was a born-again man, he knew that God would still keep His promise to Isaac. And Hebrews 11:17-19 tell us that he expected God to simply resurrect the boy on the spot after he sacrificed him.

Hebrews 11:17, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, 'IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.' [Only Isaac, you kill this boy, how are you going to fulfill that?] He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type." Isaac was as good as dead and he in fact, received them typically back from that death.

**The Friend of God AND Justified Before Men**

So, what did Abraham's faith in God that Paul described in Romans 4:19-21, confidence in spite of his age he's going to have this son, that demonstrated justification before God? But what did his willingness to sacrifice Isaac demonstrate? Justification in the sight of people. And then Abraham indeed was recognized as a man who has very close walk with God. Through the ages, Abraham has been recognized as the great friend of God. This is a combination of personal faith in the Savior, producing works that carry a person to new heights of intimacy with God. God alone sees the inward spiritual transformation of salvation, but I guarantee you that people see the outward reflection of it in your works.

**Conclusion**

Now, the rest of this passage in James has an important spiritual principles that we have to clarify as well. We're going to stop here this morning and pick it up at verse 25 in James 2. Please rethink this carefully. If you have not been hit by this, by your opponents who believe in salvation by works and by behaving yourself, by the Lordship Salvation people, this is the passage they are going to come at you with.

You should understand now what James is talking about, to whom he is addressing, what his objective is about getting people to live the Christian life obediently to the principles of the Word of God, and the consequences to them if they do not do that. James says, 'I want you to be saved in 2 ways. I want you to be saved to go to Heaven and not to Hell. That's done by a free grace gift from God.' James says, 'I want you to be saved the second way, and that is in terms of the value of your life enriching your eternity.' I know that most Christians who have heard that said are going to nod, they're going to say, 'yeah, that certainly is what he's saying.' They're not going to change. But those same Christians are going to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and they're going to say, 'I wish I'd have done better. I really knew that I could make my eternity so much grander than what it's going to be had I lived a life commensurate with the faith I professed.' May that not be true of any of us.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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