

Sermon or Lesson: James 2:14-17 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: Is Your Faith Dead Or Alive?

INTRO: In regard to your faith, are you dead or alive? Are you a stiff corpse propped up in the pew, with a plastic half-smile SuperGlued on your face through which flowery speaking plays from a tape recorder? Or instead, are you a moving functioning believer, actively living out your faith with both your speaking and your actions?

Let's examine this passage in James to see what God thinks about dead or alive faith.

READ: James 2:14-17, with vv. 8-9, 12-13 for context

This section of verses consists of a discussion about the relationship between faith and doing good works.

The context for this discussion about faith and good works is:

- - In chapter 2, the topic is the sin of showing favoritism.
 - - In previous verse 12, the exhortation emphasis is to both speak in this way and act in this way, which is to so speak and so act in accordance with the law.
 - - In previous verse 13, failure to do the action of extending mercy will result in future unpleasant judgment from God.
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v.14 - READ

[Lesson Question: Identify what is being stated in each verse and describe how that contributes to this discussion about the relationship between faith and doing good works.]

SECTION POINT: Claiming to have faith but having no deeds is of no value and is not accepted by God.

- - In verse 14, the discussion continues along the same line of contention as in the previous verses except in a broader sense: failure to act in general in accordance with one's faith has no "good" value - no "profit", no "gain", no "accumulation of benefit", no "advantageous" "good" result (Strong's #3786); i.e. it has no value to God and it produces no good result.
- - The implied contention here is that if a person "claims to have faith but has no deeds", their faith is hollow and invalid, it has no real or actual substance.
- - A second contention proposes that this person's faith is not genuinely connected with God, even though the person may think or claim that it is. If the person was genuinely connected with God, then that connection would naturally be producing in this person's life the evidence of good deeds.
- - These 2 contention concepts are presented in the form of questions, suggesting that the reader should contemplate the reality of the results of your approach to your faith,

both in the present (failing to do good deeds that match your claims of faith) and in the future (being denied eternal life).

vv.15-16 - READ

[Lesson Question: Evaluate the nature of the person's responses in verse 16.]

SECTION POINT: In verses 15-16, an example is offered to illustrate the absurdity of this person's claims of faith in correlation to his lack of action.

- - An encounter occurs with a brother or sister who is destitute, lacking basic necessities of life for survival, "clothes and daily food".
 - - The person of supposed faith sends the destitute brother/sister away, "Go in peace" (Strong's #5217, 1722, 1515), suggesting the desire of not wanting to see and deal with this destitute person and his/her desperate predicament, and also the desire that the destitute person not get upset that he/she is not going to get any help from the person of supposed faith.
 - - "Go in peace" is an absurd, condescending, and insulting statement, given the desperateness and unresolved condition of the destitute brother/sister's situation.
 - - "Keep warm and well fed" is likewise absurd, given that the destitute person has so far been unsuccessful in obtaining adequate "clothes and daily food" because he/she is "without" them.
 - - Verse 16 highlights the ridiculousness of making such statements without providing tangible help, and again questions the value of this approach to living out one's faith.
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v.17 - READ

[Lesson Question: What is the pronouncement in verse 17 and how does it correlate to the person who claims to have faith in the example in verses 15-16?]

SECTION POINT: Genuine faith produces evidence of good deeds; and conversely, not producing good deeds is evidence of dead faith.

- - Verse 17 starts with "so" "indeed" (Strong's #3779, #2532) or "in the same way indeed", referring back to the contention from the example that wishing a destitute brother/sister well with words but without tangible physical help is a worthless and dead response to the destitute brother/sister's situation.
 - - This dead response in verse 16 directly correlates to the person's faith, which is likewise dead if the faith is not accompanied by actions of good deeds.
 - - By indication then, genuinely having faith necessitates that there will be evidence of corresponding "accompanying" "deeds", "action", "works, toil, effort". (vv.14,17; Strong's #2041)
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BIG IDEA: God pronounces that your faith by itself is dead if it is not accompanied by good deeds.

IMPLICATIONS:

Q: From these verses, what implications can be properly drawn regarding the relationship between faith and good deeds (or actions)?

- - True genuine faith requires, bears, includes, expresses itself, reacts, and produces godly deeds.
 - - False or fake faith brings forth no good deeds, no profit, no tangible care and assistance for others; in reality this false faith is an empty profession, a pious pretense.
 - - Faith that bears no good fruit is worthless to God; i.e. God expects good deeds to always accompany one's faith.
 - - True faith motivates us into action, propelling us beyond mere compassionate words and feelings.
 - - True faith proves itself, consistently producing evidences of good deeds.
 - - True faith necessitates investing tangible effort and/or resources in the well-being of others at a personal cost to oneself.
 - - True faith is alive with actions that specifically target the needs of others.
 - - Believers have the responsibility to tangibly help others in physical need. (see v.1:27)
 - - Dead faith is devoid of actions, is perhaps lazy and/or selfish, and yet may be swimming in warm sounding speaking.
 - - Claiming to have faith that actually is deeds-less can lead to or connect to erroneously thinking one has acquired salvation through that faith (v.14); it also causes one to be a hypocrite when speaking about the needs of others.
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[Additional Lesson Questions to ponder (optional, if time allows):

- - Is it possible to have saving faith by itself, without accompanying actions?
 - - Is it possible to have saving faith by itself, and then later on add works?
 - - Is identifying that a supposed believer is producing good deeds a way we can use in trying to determine whether that person really is saved or not?]
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APPLICATIONS:

It is time to take a self-assessment:

- - Is your faith dead or alive?
- - From this passage, does God say your faith is dead or alive?

Does God approve of your faith?

- - Does God find your faith to be mere worthless words? Are you a smooth talker, pronouncing all sorts of warm sounding salutations, but never backing up your flowery speech with tangible help?

-- Or does God find that your faith is being lived out through your doing of good deeds?

Do you regularly act upon your faith by doing good deeds?

- Like what, for example? Coming to church and parking yourself in the pew does not count here as a good deed. Neither does wishing people well with only mere words. So specifically what good deeds have you done in the last week, the last month, the last 6 months, the last year? Silently in your own mind, can you list any?
- Does God approve of your good deeds?

Do your actions match your claims that you have faith?

Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

"Strong's Greek Dictionary." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

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