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What is "Dead Faith?"

by: Daniel Weierbach, Assoc. Pastor

"He [James] says that people can be deluded into thinking they believe when in fact they do not, and he says that the *single factor* that distinguishes counterfeit faith from the real thing is the *righteous behavior* inevitably produced in those who have authentic faith."
(emphasis mine)

~ John MacArthur,
promoting the Calvinist
tenet of Perseverance of
the Saints

<http://www.gty.org/resources/articles/A154/faith-according-to-the-apostle-james>

Lordship Salvation has been gaining influence over the years; the teaching surrounding the fifth point of Calvinism (T-U-L-I-P), Perseverance of the Saints. The teaching that if one is truly saved, then they will continue to do good deeds, and grow in well-doing, as they "persevere" in life until they are called home. This has caused many believers to doubt their conversion experience based upon their current conduct in life, and has led to many Christians getting "resaved." One of the leading passages used in defense of this argument is found in James 2:20 "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" Is this what James is truly saying, that if our faith has no works, then our faith is no faith at all? Unfortunately many scholars and pastors, past and present, have presented this to be the case, that one *must* show their faith by their good works, else they are not genuine Christians. I beg to differ, and provide

evidence to the contrary. Whether or not you agree with me at the end of this article is upon

This passage corroborating Lordship Salvation "sounds plausible, until it is examined."

~Bob Wilkin, GES

you, however, I do pray that you continue reading and search the truth out for yourself as opposed to what many Christians do, as well as I at times, and simply regurgitate what we have been told; I implore you, be a Berean (Acts 17:11-12).

Let me preface by saying, regardless if one holds the view of this passage that genuine faith requires, or does not require, works, we all agree that salvation is based upon no merit of our own, rather, we are saved by grace through faith. However, the divide is revealed in the realm of sanctification; the process whereby we grow to become more

Christ-like in our life. On Calvin's side are those that state good works *must* be evident to *prove our salvation*, on the other, good works *should* be evident in *light of our salvation*; I believe the latter.

So, what does the passage mean? Since James is writing to a specific audience, during a specific time, in the midst of a specific situation, we must interpret the passage in light of that context. In the first verse we read that James is writing to Jewish believers who were scattered throughout the region due to their faith in Jesus Christ; we read about the beginning of this dispersion in the book of Acts 6:8-8:1. Without going into detail here, these Jews could either flee into another country, or possibly face death as a martyr; many chose the former. This is similar to what's been happening in Iraq and many other nations around the globe. With the ISIS takeover, Muslims are forcing non-Muslim (cont. on page 2)

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believers to either pay the jizyah (unbeliever tax), leave their home, convert to Islam, or die for their faith.

Keeping that in mind, we have the background of the believers of which James is writing. First, James encourages them in their time of trial (1:2-18), reminding them that God is with them and that He will use the trial for their benefit and His glory. And even though their situation is unfavorable, they need to continue doing what is right in the sight of God (1:19-27). One area James mentions is the area of discrimination; in the beginning of chapter 2, he reminds them to not judge people based upon what they look like, but to love all people, regardless. This would be a common pitfall in their situation. They fled from their home, trying to rebuild their lives, re-establish a synagogue. When they had a visitor who appeared to be rich and could contribute financially to the synagogue, they treated them differently; much better than they did with the poor person who would attend. They ensured they were greeted by all members of the assembly, ensured their coffee was hot enough and their breakfast was good. They gave them the best seat in the synagogue, in the best location. Meanwhile, the person who came in who had nothing and came to hear an encouraging word or to find the way of salvation, they disregarded. God, through James, rebuked them and charged them to change (2:1-13). Being honest with ourselves, how many of us, if we were in the same situation as these Jews, would have done this same thing unintentionally; looking to man for providence rather than God?

Skipping to chapter 3, James writes to them about their needing to tame their tongue and try to control what they say. He mentions the various pitfalls of the tongue and how at many times we are found blessing God and cursing men (3:9). Why would James write this about the tongue? Again, these Jews are having to rebuild their lives and live their faith, how easy would it be to speak ill of others, come off the wrong way, and ruin their testimony, as they spoke in the flesh. Again, can we truly fault these Jews for their ill-advised words? How many of us, in unfavorable situations, speak things that we later come to regret?

So, between James' rebuke of their partiality (2:1-13) and his rebuke of their words (3:1-12). So why would James write a small snippet about eternal salvation in the middle of these passages (James 2:14-26)? I submit to you he did not write about eternal salvation here, but rather physical salvation. The question James poses to these Jews is: what profit is there of their faith if they do not do good works? He hammers home that if they do not do good works then their faith is dead. Do I agree that faith without works is dead? Of course I do! This is the infallible word of God. However, I do believe this passage has been misinterpreted by many. The illustration that James uses for a dead faith is that of a Christian which sees someone in dire need of food and clothes and instead of providing for them physically, they simply pray for them (2:15-16). Giving this story he asks the questions, what does the Christian's faith profit? The context is not about the Christian's faith profiting himself/herself, but rather how the Christian's faith profits the individual in need.

James then uses two Old Testament examples about living one's faith and being justified. He mentions Abraham and his faith in God to sacrifice Isaac upon Mount Moriah (Genesis 22) and the harlot Rahab and how she hid the spies and allowed them to escape from Jericho (Joshua 2). James indicates that their faith was made complete by their works (2:22) and how they were justified by their works (2:25). These verses cannot mean that Abraham and Rahab were saved because of their works, for the Bible indicates they were saved before these events happened. For Rahab, I personally believe it occurred upon meeting the spies and her faith in God and His ability to protect her and her family (Joshua 2:12-13). Abraham's conversion is easier to find, for it is seen in Genesis 15:6 "he believed in the LORD, and He counted it to him for righteousness." Therefore, we can understand these two individuals were saved before their acts of good works which James references. Furthermore, we can see that *in light* of their salvation, they were able to perform these good works. Additionally, when James speaks of them (cont. on page 3)

Did You Know:
“Martin Luther was so vexed by James 2:14-26, that he urged his students to ‘throw the epistle of James out of this school [i.e. Wittenberg], for it doesn’t amount to much (LW 54, 424)!”

Lazar, Shawn. *Grace in Focus*, March & April 2014, (Grace Evangelical Society), p3.



Photo courtesy of: <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/nazarene/>

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being justified, the word *justified* is in present tense, not the aorist tense. Meaning that they are *living* their faith in the present by performing those good works.

James then mentions that to have faith and not works is to have a dead faith. This dead faith James is speaking of is not *spiritually* dead. You see, the Greek word for dead is *nekros*, and can have multiple meanings. First it can mean to be "spiritually dead," unsaved. Another definition is that it can mean "inactive or inoperative;" again context must drive the proper definition. Seeing that nothing James has written is regarding spiritual salvation but rather physical circumstances and situations, it would make for a poor exegete to insert a spiritual connotation in this passage. Furthermore, the passages before and after are regarding loving others and living the faith. Therefore, the proper definition for *nekros* is to be inactive or inoperative.

When we read this passage in light of having an inactive or inoperative faith, we truly understand the meaning of what James is saying. That if we, Christians, see someone with a physical need and simply ignore that need when we can provide, then we, presently, have a dead, or inactive faith. It's not that we don't have the faith, but rather it is inactive in our lives.

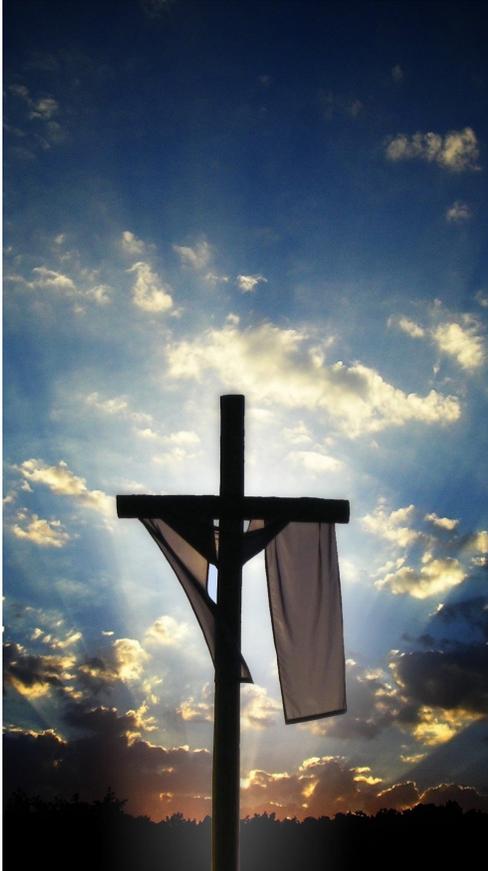
You see, one of the many questions that arises when someone says that works must accompany faith is the question of "when is salvation (or eternal life) received?" Must we endure to the end, persevere in the faith in order to be assured of heaven, as the Calvinist's purport? No! We receive eternal life at the moment of conversion, this is evident in many areas of the Bible (John 3:15, 16, 36, 5:24, 6:47, 10:28, 1 John 5:13). Each of these verses mention receiving eternal life (i.e. salvation) in the present tense, not a future reward to be gained. Therefore, if we receive salvation at the single moment of conversion, and if we are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) and kept by the power of God (1 Peter 1:5), then we can rest assured that we will remain saved from that one moment on, regardless of our conduct.

But this belief brings about the continuance of sin, right? As Paul wrote in Romans 6:2, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" We must also realize that should we choose to trample on the grace of God that delivered us from so much, then we will be chastised by God (Hebrews 12:5-8), and possibly be brought home early by a sin that leads to death (1 John 5:16). Also, though the Great White Throne Judgment is for unbelievers, we believers will give an account to Jesus for what we did with our faith at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-15); it will be there where we give an account on whether our faith was dead or alive.

It is my prayer that you see in this passage that God wants us to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). By doers, he expounds that, regardless of our circumstance in life, we should treat all people equally, no matter how much one may seem to be able to help us as opposed to others. We need try to keep our tongue in check, regardless of our current situation, no matter how dreary it may be. Lastly, and the cause for this study, is that we should have an active faith, so as to help others who are in need, rather than just solely focusing on our trials and circumstances. So fellow Christian, do not live in fear as to whether you are a genuine Christian or not, for if you turned to Christ for forgiveness of your sins, by his death and resurrection, you are saved and eternally secure, not based on your works, but based upon the precious work and promises of God!



Be Sure Heaven is YOUR Home!



1. Recognize YOUR Condition: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)

No one is good enough to go to heaven on his/her own merit. No matter how much good we do, we still fall short.

2. Realize the PENALTY for Sin: "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23)

Just as there are wages (payment) for good, there is punishment for wrong. The penalty for our sin is eternal death in a literal, real place called Hell.

3. Believe Jesus Christ Died for YOU: "But God commendeth His love for us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

Jesus Christ's great love for us was shown when He died on the cross to pay our debt.

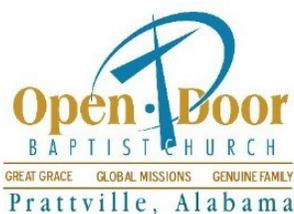
4. Trust Christ ALONE as Your Savior: "...But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Everlasting life is a gift purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ and offered freely to ALL those who call upon Him by faith.

Let us help you word a prayer. (Realize it's not the words that save, but your genuine faith in Jesus Christ):

Pray: Dear Jesus, I know I'm a sinner. Please forgive me for my sins. I ask you Jesus to cleanse me from my sin and save my soul from hell. I'm trusting you alone for eternal life and to take me to heaven when I die. Thank you for your sacrifice on the cross for my salvation, Amen!

If you prayed that prayer, and sincerely meant it, please contact us here at Open Door.



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OD Café begins @ 9:15 am
Sunday Worship Service @ 10:00 am
Sunday Night Growth Groups @ 6:00 pm
AWANA Wednesday Night @ 6:30 pm
Wednesday Night Bible Study & Prayer @ 7:00 pm

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