

# Personal Study

## JAMES PART 5 FAITH / WORKS

**"FAITH AND WORKS AREN'T MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. IN FACT, JAMES TELLS US THAT FAITH APART FROM WORKS IS DEAD. WORKS DON'T SAVE US, BUT GOOD WORKS SHOULD FOLLOW TRUE FAITH."**

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**This week's text:** James 2:14-26

**Introduction:**

Have you ever built a piece of Ikea furniture? If your honest, it usually is an “interesting” experience. I have never been one to read the instructions when building something. I would rather figure it out as it is being built. When building a piece of Ikea furniture however, this often proves to be quite difficult.

Recently, my wife and I purchased a piece of furniture, and I did what I typically do and tossed the directions to the side and began “building”. After about 30 minutes had passed, my wife had to intervein and ensure that I was sticking to the instructions and building the piece of furniture in the proper order.

Here is the big idea: Order matters.

Order matters because it has an immediate effect on the outcome.

When it comes to the topic of our salvation, the order in which it takes place especially matters. Why? Because the outcome will either point to **us** as our savior or to **Jesus** as our savior.

James tackles this issue in the key passage listed below.

**Read and reflect on James 2:14-26**

James opens with the big question in verse 14 that has been debated in the church for centuries: “Can faith that does not yield works save us?”

We must pause and ask ourselves, “what is James saying here?”. Is it possible that James is implying that our salvation is dependent on both faith and works? ***If this is the case, then doesn't this directly contradict the writings of New Testament apostles such as Paul?***

For example, Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:8-9 that we are saved by grace and not by works so that no man may boast.

So, which is it? Are we saved by grace through faith? Or are we saved by grace through faith and works?

This has been a question that Christian thought leaders have been debating for a very long time.

Ready to get a bit Theological?

There are two primary “camps” of interpretation around this topic (however, there are dozens of others. So this doesn’t even scratch the surface) :

1. Monergism: The interpretation that Jesus reached down to save us while we are dead in our sin. This is an “irresistible” grace that will certainly save us of sin by granting us the gift of faith (or belief). This soteriology (Theology of Salvation) is commonly held by the Reformed Theological tradition.
2. Synergism: While we were far from Christ, Jesus reaches down to save (Grace), and we reach back to receive (Belief, Faith, Works) salvation. This soteriology (Theology of Salvation) is commonly held by the Arminian Tradition (Wesleyan, etc).

So who was right? James or Paul? Monergists or Synergists (or other “isim’s”)?

This is a trick question. The answer of course is that both James and Paul do not contradict each other but complement one another. Similarly, at the root, both Monergism and Synergism (and several other “isim’s”) begin with the same complementary idea: We were dead in our sin, and Jesus made the first move – extended grace when we did not deserve it. This grace was a gift of God, not a work of man. So, the origin and completion of our salvation is Jesus and Jesus alone.

Remember, the “order” of our salvation is a big deal. If we miss this truth and somehow think that our salvation is a result of OUR good work, then we have missed the point. Jesus made the first move. When we hated God, He loved us. When we rebelled in our sin, Jesus extends grace, love, and mercy. Salvation originates with Jesus and is carried out by the sustaining grace of Jesus.

When examining these questions by comparing both the writings of James and the writings of Paul, we must remember a few items:

1. We must always use the entirety of the Bible when interpreting a small portion of the Bible. This will ensure that our interpretation is in alignment with the scriptures as a whole and does not wavier from the truth.
2. We see in the writings of Paul that he is placing emphasis on the idea that Salvation is first and foremost **a gift** that cannot be earned. James continues this idea by giving specific emphasis to the **result** of saving faith---works!

In essence of the doctrine of Salvation can be boiled down to two primary items:

1. God works **IN** us (Salvation / gift of grace to us)
2. God works **THROUGH** us (works, fruit, evidence of saving faith)

Both are inseparable and are completely essential to the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. **Saving faith will always yield Christ likeness** (works).

## **Reflection and Application:**

So after taking some time to read and reflect on James 2:14-26, is there evidence of saving faith in our lives? In other words, is the overflow of our salvation experience resulting in:

- our affections continually growing for Jesus and His Word?
- continued growth in Holiness and repentance of sin?
- a deep desire to see those far from Christ come to saving faith?
- an urgency to share the Gospel with those God has placed in your life?
- the desire to encourage, edify, and build others with our language?
- the desire to see all people as Jesus sees them?
- growth in the fruit of the Spirit?

By God's grace, we continue to make progress (not perfection) until He returns. If we are failing to see the fruit of our faith in our life, then we have to honestly evaluate our standing before Jesus.

**Here is the good news:** Jesus has provided the grace that you need today. Whether it's the grace to continue following Him, or the forgiveness of your sin past/present/future, Jesus is enough. He loves you deeper than you could ever know. He desires to see you flourish in Christ-likeness and bring Glory to Him in everything that we say, think, and do. The gift of Grace has already been provided on your behalf. Simply receive it by faith.