

Faithworks

Balancing Faith, Grace, and Works

June 20, 2021

Today we're looking at the *leap* that comes *after* the faith.



But before we jump into *that*, answer *this*: **Do you trust what you believe to be true?** It's easy to evaluate because **we act on that which we trust.** And on the flip side, **we don't act on that which we don't trust.** Because ... we don't *trust* it.



But we're warned by Jesus' brother, James that **faith without acts of faith is dead.** Because living, growing, thriving, peachy, fruit-producing faith requires what brother James calls for, and what I'm calling *faithworks*. Like *fireworks*. Because without faithworks there's nothing to see. But ...

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. [That's how you *extinguish* it] Instead they put it on its stand, [often the upside down *bowl* – like a tiny little *city* on a miniature *hill*] and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. – Matthew 5:14-16 NIV

You see, when those around you “in the house” begin to see the *visible* changes *He's* developing in *you* – which often shows up in how *you* treat *them* – their gratefulness for *God's* work through *your* faith brings *Him* glory – something dead religion could never *do*, but happens quite naturally when a living relationship with the Lord is allowed to do what it supernaturally does. *Because* ...

[The law] can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ... those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins ... Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; but when this Priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God. ... because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. ... [But] You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised. [To make you *holy*: complete, and mature] – Hebrews 10:1-36 NIV

[He even *warns* us that] “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father” – Matthew 7:21 NIV

Emphasis on “does”. Jesus’ brother James tells us that we must be *doers*. But **we gotta be careful not to be over-doers**, like that Christian “circumcision group” (Titus 1:10) who ...

... were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” [By faith in Christ] – Acts 15:1 NIV

But we’ve been seeing how Paul’s been saying that:



It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise [of the Christ to come] ... but through the righteousness that comes by faith. [Since Abraham was given the *sign* of circumcision 24 years after receiving the promise and walking according to what he trusted to *be true*] ... so that it may be by

grace – Romans 4:13-16 NIV

[But brother James says] What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ... [I mean, come on; don’t be an *under-doer*!] faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. – James 2:14, 17 NIV

[Paul says] A man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus ... by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. – Galatians 2:16 NAS

[Brother James says] Was not Abraham our father justified by **works** when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? – James 2:21 NAS

And the answer is yes. And they *don’t* disagree. At *all*. Because James *isn’t* talking about “works of the Law”, he’s talking about “works of faith”, because Abraham already had faith – it was even already accounted to him as righteousness (like with us and Christ) – and Abraham already had a solid relationship with God; but God, wanting growth, *tested* his faith. So brother James says:



Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. [“You need to persevere”] Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, – James 1:2-4 NIV



How soft, spineless, and sad we’d be without trials; like confined lions with no room to run. The deep dark jungle is a dangerous and place; but **there’s a deep joy in the jungle you can’t catch in a cage!** And *after* we’re made perfect by *Jesus’* sacrifice, **we’re set as free as we want to be**, and made fruitful by acting according to that which we trust to be true. *That’s our faithworks*, because that’s *how* faith works. **Life and death struggles drive our faith to depths possible no other way;** but, *only* if we *act* like *believers* and *trust* our *Savior* and *turn* to

our *Father* for the wisdom to stand strong in the deep dark down here.

[Brother James continues] If any of you lacks wisdom, [during the test] you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, [It's a time of testing and stretching and strengthening, so He understands if you're distressed or depressed or on edge] and it will be given to you. [the *wisdom* and *growth* that comes from the test if you can just trust what is true] But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, [in the supremacy of the wisdom of God] because the one who doubts [during the test] is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. [And that's painful and gets you nowhere] That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. [Through the testing of their faith. How could they?] Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. [Pick a team!] – James 1:5-8 NIV



If we're obedient only when it's convenient, and jump ship when things get rough, we'll just end up an emotional wreck. However, **don't think of faith as blind trust.** It's *not*. A *leap of faith* isn't like jumping off a cliff in the dark and *hoping* for the best. It's like bungee jumping. Jesus came to give *sight* to the *blind*. He wants us to take a good look *before* we leap, because **faith is a determination to trust and to do what you know to be true despite how you feel.** Because, even *after* examining the apparatus and getting firmly strapped in, it *still* requires *jungle-lion-courage* to take that eyes-wide-open leap of faith into deep empty space.

But if you *call* yourself a bungee *jumper* – *and* you've even taken the little lesson before the plunge – but you've never actually *jumped* ... you can't *really* call yourself a bungee *jumper*. You're a *jumpee*. An untrusting *jumpy* wannabe. So if *you've* examined and embraced God's love and grace, **it's high time to act according to what you believe.** Or stop telling yourself you trust something you obviously *don't*. Or at best "trust" in a double-minded, wishy-washy sort of way.



Don't calibrate your *convictions* by your surroundings. **Calibrate your courage according to the cross!** Because if you really believe what Christ accomplished on that cross, and the power and authority *He* displayed over the grave, and the promise He made to give us eternal life, when we inevitably die down here, why wouldn't you take the leap and let your faith streeeeetch?

[Abraham's leap was *based* on what he *knew* to be *true*] By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." [But] Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, [and he didn't even have the confirmation of the cross!] – Hebrews 11:17-19 NIV

According to James, talk is cheap. But each choice we make to do what's right in spite of emotion, condition, or situation will display a deep love and trust in the God who has saved us

and is making us into something more mature than we were when He found us. So **we can't talk our way to Heaven; we gotta jump!** As James points out: if faith was merely a matter of intellectual recognition and not gratitude-motivated faithworks, even the *demons* would be saved!

You have faith and I have works [of faith]; show me your faith without the [faith] works, and I will show you my faith by my [faith] works." [Because they shine the signs of my growth, and bring glory to God. It's not about *earning* salvation with works of the law, but displaying trust with acts of faith] You believe that God is one. [Okay. Father, Son, and Spirit] You do well; [that's great; you *believe* the right *thing*. But have you read much about Jesus?] the demons also believe, and shudder. – James 2:18-19 NAS

The prince of darkness is many things, but he ain't an atheist! And James says we're pretty much neck and neck with him till we *truly* receive *salvation* by *Dad's* grace through *our* faith in our Savior's sacrifice, and then begin to act according to who we claim to trust. **So pick a team!** Commentators talk about Paul and James like they're adversaries on faith, grace, and works. But I think they make a great tag team. They're sure on the same page when it comes to salvation by God's grace through Jesus' sacrifice producing the fruit of the Spirit.

[Brother James writes] The wisdom that comes from heaven [when we lack it, and ask for it, without doubting it, during our time of testing (1:5-6)] is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, [which Paul lists in one of *his* letters as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23)] – James 3:17 NIV

And Paul makes it clear to the Ephesians that he and brother James are in agreement.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith [that "by one sacrifice He has *made perfect* forever those who are *being made* holy" (Heb 10:14)] ... For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works [of *faith*] – Ephesians 2:8, 10 NIV



Salvation is kind of like a tree of life that *we* allow *Jesus* to plant in our heart. It's not for sale. Couldn't afford it if it was. So He only plants it for free – so our *only* part in that *initial* process is to accept it or reject it. But once planted, it begins to grow. **The fruit doesn't produce the tree, the tree produces the fruit.** But the *yield* depends on yielding our heart to our Master Gardner. Therefore, says James:

Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. [Especially when times are tough and your faith is tested, 'cause that's how Dad is making us holy *after* getting us saved] Anyone who listens to the Word [as a believer] but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, [after seeing what needs some tending] goes away and immediately forgets what he

looks like. [You know, dried blood from shaving nick and a big ol' white head on his forehead] But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that [guides the perfected to growth, and when trusted and acted on] gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it [because he's *trusting* it]—he will be [further] blessed in what he does. [And God will be further glorified] – James 1:21-25 NIV

Because **a faithful heart can't help but start to grow in fruitful works of grateful-obedience.** So begin to *do* what you *trust* to be *true*; take the *leap* that comes *after* the faith; and watch that little tree blossom and grow ... like a fireworks show!