

The Outcome of Sanctification

How Faith Works Itself OUT IN Our Lives

"Faith Works" Series, July 20 & 21, 2024 | James 2:14-26

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Have you ever eaten a sanctification sandwich?

Sanctification is the process of God making us holy.

It may be shocking to think that you can be holy. Most of us are too aware of our sins, flaws, and brokenness to think that we could ever be holy. We think of God as holy, and we know that we are not holy.

However, when we become disciples of Jesus, God puts his Holy Spirit inside of us. Jesus takes away our sin and puts his righteousness in us. Jesus himself dwells, remains, or abides with us.

God the Holy Spirit begins to remake us into the image of God; the Holy Spirit renews us.

So, we are being made holy. We are being sanctified. It's surprising but true.

Tim Ponzani showed us that James served a sanctification sandwich.

Two weeks ago, Tim covered the end of James chapter one.

Those verses had three parts. Part one said that we act. Part two said that we open ourselves up to the work of God. Part three said that we then try again.

The first part said, "Control your anger and put away wicked things." Act like you're holy!

The second part said, "Then take the Word of God, Jesus, into your life. Let Jesus and the Holy Spirit work in you. Then look intently into the Word of God, the Bible. Study it and absorb it."

The third part said, "Then try again. Bridle your tongue. Do good deeds."

Sanctification is like a sandwich.

It's a three-part process—act, reflect with God on how you're doing, and then try again.

The two outside parts are the actions; they are like the bread on the outside of a sandwich.

The one part on the inside, though, is the most important part. It's the work of God in our lives. That's the meat or the filling. That's what makes the sandwich a sandwich.

Sanctification is like a Whoopie Pie.

It's a lump of cream icing sandwiched between two mounds of chocolate cake.

It's perfect because it's a cookie AND it's a sandwich all in one.

The way sanctification works its way INTO our lives is like a Whoopie Pie.

The icing in the middle is like the work of God in our lives to make us holy. The two pieces of cake on the outside are the works we do to practice being holy. We try, God changes us, then we try again and, hopefully, get things more right than we did the last time.

It's a sanctification sandwich. But the thing about sanctification sandwiches is that you have to eat them!

It's not enough to know what the sanctification process is.

We have to work the process! We have to take the process into our lives and implement it.

We have to take a bite of the Whoopie Pie. That's how sanctification works itself INTO our lives.

But how does sanctification work itself OUT in our lives?

How does it come out?

James resolutely reminds us that what's going on inside of us has to turn into the way we act.

Our faith in God comes out in what we do, how we speak, how we treat one another, how we use what God has given us, and, generally speaking, how we live. That's how faith works.

Faith without works is useless.

James 2:14-17 tells us that faith without works is useless:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James illustrates his point with the use of words in the face of genuine need.

"What good is it, my brothers," James asks. Then he poses a dilemma they would understand.

What if another member of their local church showed up poorly clothed and lacking in daily food?

Now, please understand that the clothing situation is actually that they are living in rags. And the food situation is that the cupboard is always (perpetually) a little bare.

What if you saw another member of the local church in this situation. What would you do?

With so many desperately needy Christians in the Church, this happened frequently.

To say to them, "I hope things work out" or "I will pray for you" is not helpful.

What good is that? A person without adequate clothing and without daily food needs clothing and food! In that case, words are useless. James is saying that faith without works is like that. It's useless. It doesn't do anything in the real world.

Then James introduces an imaginary opponent in verse 18:

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

James uses the phrase, "But someone will say..."

The words that follow are the hypothetical words of that someone else.

Then James carries on a dialogue with this hypothetical person. This hypothetical person embraces the position that James disagrees with. James is going to argue with this person.

But in picking an imaginary opponent, he's really putting words he had actually heard among some Christians into the mouth of his opponent.

James is giving a voice to some of us who think that works are really not required.

James knew that there were people then who thought that faith and works were two options that they could choose between, like we choose coffee creamers.

"You have works? Nice. I have faith."

Faith, from this point of view, is more like belief. To say that I have faith, not works, means that I have a right belief system; that's good enough, and it doesn't have to change my life.

There are some people today who embrace the thought that troubled Jesus' half-brother.

"What good is that?" James is asking. Not much. It's useless.

Faith without works is incomplete.

James 2:19 presents the example of demons to point out that belief is not complete faith.

You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

To say that we believe that God is one is the most foundational belief statement we make.

It is the heart of the ancient confession of Israel. "Hear, O Israel. The LORD our God, the LORD is one ..." There is one God, and the LORD is that God.

But for Christians as well, the confession that God is one is still foundational. God is three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) but still one being, one God.

So, James is saying, "You can get your doctrine right." Right doctrine, though, is not the end.

James says that the demons have right doctrine. Demons are fallen angels. They have seen God face to face in the heavenly realm. They have right doctrine, but they have turned in sinful rebellion against God anyway. They have changed their loyalties and engaged in sin.

Right doctrine, James says, lacks loyalty, love, and action. It is still incomplete faith.

This is a big thing for us to grasp today. As disciples of Jesus, our faith should touch our heads, hearts, and hands. What happens in our heads is important. Critical. That's where we know God. Then what happens in our hearts (our life-change, love, and loyalty) is important as well. That's followed by what happens with our hands (our actions in loving obedience to God). Those are important as well. If faith is just a head thing, it is incomplete.

James 2:20-24 presents Abraham as an example that reminds us that faith is completed by works.

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Abraham is the patriarch in Genesis from whom the whole nation of Israel descends.

God called Abraham out of a pagan city and a pagan lifestyle to go to a new land where he would declare his loyalty to God, live for God, and father God's people.

After decades of obedience, Abraham and his wife, Sarah, had a child—a son, Isaac.

Shockingly, God told Abraham to go to the top of a mountain and offer Isaac as a sacrifice.

With great pain, Abraham set out on the journey. Just before he went through with the sacrifice, God stopped his hand. God had wanted to see Abraham's faith—what he would do in loving obedience to God. Abraham demonstrated that he belonged to God!

From that point forward, Abraham was called a friend of God.

That's not really being saved by works, though. It is to be justified by works in the sense that the works prove (justify) the character of faith and earn the favor and smile of God.

That's not really being SAVED by works, though. It's being saved by complete faith—faith completed by works.

James 2:25 presents Rahab as an additional example that true faith leads to works.

And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Rahab was a woman living in Jericho when the people of Israel were on their long journey from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.

As the Israelites spied out the land of Canaan, they came to Jericho.

The leaders of Jericho heard that spies were around and sought to capture them.

Rahab hid the men. **Joshua 2:9** tells why. She said,

... "I know that the LORD has given you the land ..."

She did it out of faith. In faith, she hid the Israelites and got them safely out of the city.

She was justified in the sense that her works PROVED the completeness of her faith. She gained the smile of God. When the Israelites destroyed Jericho with the power of God, they saved Rahab. Rahab eventually became an ancestor of King David and of Jesus!

Thus, the contrast is not really between faith and works.

Faith and works don't compete; works complete faith.

The contrast James is really drawing is between incomplete faith and complete faith.

Faith without works is dead.

James 2:26 compares faith without works to a body without a spirit:

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

The spirit gives life to the human body.

The spirit we have inside of us is like the breath God breathed into us when he created us.

Genesis 2:7 reminds us:

... then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

When Jesus raised a girl who had died back to life, her spirit came back into her. **Luke 8:55** says:

And her spirit returned, and she got up at once...

When Jesus died on the cross, the Bible says that he gave up his spirit. **Luke 23:46** says:

... "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.

James is claiming that faith without works is inert, missing that which gives it life.

The spirit gives life to the body.

James says that faith without works is like a body without a spirit.

It's doing nothing. It's inert. It's not breathing. It's not alive. It's dead.

Jesus tells us that works bring faith to life.

Works add movement, breath, and action to faith. In **John 14:15** Jesus says:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

The direct link is between love and keeping his commandments.

However, the implication for faith is clear.

Faith is like loving God, and keeping Jesus' commandments is the outworking of that faith. "If you love me, if you have faith in me and obey me, then your faith will come out in works."

Our works get our faith moving, keep our faith breathing, and bring our faith to full life.

Faith is like my tractor this spring; I put the wires back in place, and everything fires up!

I have a lawn tractor for mowing and for doing projects around our yard.

If you put your lawn tractor away without proper maintenance, it isn't likely to start in the spring. So, last fall I did the fall maintenance to make sure that it started right up in the spring.

This spring I went out to my tractor expecting it to start right up, but it made a sad clicking noise and did nothing. I charged the battery. Nothing. I changed the battery. Nothing.

I had it towed away to the small engine-repair shop.

They found that some wires had corroded, and others had been chewed by mice. They fixed the wires. Then everything was connected, and the lawn tractor fired right up.

Faith without works is like a lawn mower without wires! It's dead. It does nothing. But faith completed with works is like a lawn mower with its wires. It fires up and gets the job done!

Genuine faith in God comes out in works.

Salvation is a gift; it's by grace through faith, complete faith.

Jesus obeyed his Father perfectly and lived a perfectly righteous life.

Then he died on the cross to pay the price for our sin.

If we accept forgiveness through Jesus, we are forgiven for our sin.

We are also given Jesus' perfect and complete righteousness, and we are born again. It's a gift.

Paul explains it in **Ephesians 2:8-9**:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We are saved by grace through faith and not by works.

But the faith that saves us is complete faith, and complete faith comes out in works.

Paul explained in the very next verse, **Ephesians 2:10**:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Genuine, complete faith comes out in works.

What does James mean by works?

Well, he's not saying "works of law." Works of the law include things done to earn salvation. Those are things particularly that are done in obedience to the Old Testament's ritual laws.

We as Christians are not required to follow ritual laws pertaining to things like feasts and sacrifices. We do not follow the moral laws in order to earn our salvation.

Those are works of the law. James is not telling us to do those things.

Instead, James is calling us to actions done in loving obedience to God.

Having been forgiven, redeemed, saved by grace, given new life and eternal life, adopted as sons and daughters of God, and filled with the Holy Spirit, we respond in gratitude.

In gratitude and as an outworking of what God is doing inside of us, we act in loving obedience to God. We do things. We obey moral laws to show our love for God. We serve people to show our love for God. We share the Gospel to show our love for God.

James shows us examples of what actions done in loving obedience to God look like.

Works done in loving obedience to God includes serving the poor, particularly poor brothers or sisters in Christ, particularly the powerless, like widows and those without parents.

Works done in loving obedience to God include sacrifices we make, like being generous with our treasures like money, talents, affection, and attention. Like Abraham.

Works done in loving obedience to God include joining God's mission, even when it involves risks, discomforts, and dislocation. Like Rahab.

What has God been telling you to do?

This is a good season to spend time listening to God's Spirit through prayer and fasting.

James is calling all of us to peer-to gaze and look-intently into God's Word, the Bible.

In these places we hear God speaking to us, telling us what works he asks of us.

Then again, you probably already know. You probably know now what God wants from you.

Make a resolution right now to do it.

Keep taking bites of that sanctification sandwich, so that sanctification works its way INTO your life.

Then let genuine faith in God come out in works.

That's how faith works.