

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“FAITH: SUBSTANCE AND EVIDENCE”

James 2:14-26

☑ Beth, I love you; but don't hold your breath waiting for me to say you are beautiful, or that you are doing a great job, or I appreciate you. I would rather talk about me.

Beth, I love you; but don't call me during the day, or try to talk to me while the game is on, or ask me to go out to dinner with you. I am much too busy.

Beth, I love you; but you won't be getting anniversary flowers or a birthday present or a Christmas gift. I am saving up to buy something special...for myself.

Beth, I love you; but I am not taking out the garbage, or loading the dishwasher, or helping with the laundry. I hate doing household chores.

Beth, I love you; but don't expect any hand holding or hugging. I want a different kind of touching.

Is that love?

Is it the kind of love that grows and sustains and protects a marriage or even a good friendship?

Is it the kind of love that glorifies God, edifies each partner, and blesses the world?

Is that the kind of love you want to give and receive?

I can say, “I love you” till I am blue in the face – but until my love is embodied in words and deeds of kindness, gentleness, humility, generosity, service, patience, encouragement, mercy, truth, commitment and sacrifice, it is not genuine and alive.

Apart from tangible expression, what we might call “love” is only the idea or possibility of love; it does not yet exist. Words and actions of a particular quality and intent are not merely the *evidence* of love; they are the *substance* of love.

☼ So it is with faith. Faith consists of word *and* action. Not only does action prove that faith exists, it is what makes faith real. Righteous words and deeds that are consistent with the example set by Jesus and the teachings of Scripture are *both* the substance and evidence of faith.

■ Please turn with me to James 2:14 {TNIV}:

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such a faith save them?” The Greek literally says, **“What is the profit if anyone says they have faith but do not have works?”** The implied answer is obvious: it is of no benefit whatsoever.

“Can such a faith save them?” Again, the implied answer is unmistakable: such “faith” lacks all power to save.

■ Later, in v 26, James warns: **“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”**

☑ {Life Application Bible} **“It is not enough to talk the Christian faith...We must live it... The... reality of our faith...is a changed life.”** In today's text alone (2:14-26), the Greek word for **“deeds”** appears 12 times, the word for **“faith”** is used 11 times, and the words for **“belief”** and **“believe”** show up 3 times.

This is the core message of the Book of James.

○ James is *not* saying that we are rescued from sin, death, and the devil by our character or our deeds or our verbal confession. He would affirm the Apostle Paul's declaration that **"it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith – and this not from [ourselves], it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast"** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

○ James *is* saying that saving faith is absolutely inseparable from a transformed life revealed in who we are, what we say, and what we do. As we read in Ephesians 2:10, **"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."** While we are not saved *by* good works, we are saved *for* good works. Righteous words and deeds are *both* the substance and evidence of faith. It follows that if we have no good works, our faith is *not* a saving faith.

■ James 2:18-19: **"But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder."** Do we at least tremble before the Holy, Almighty God in whom we claim to believe?

■ In verses 20-25 James offers two potent models of living faith.

The first is Abraham. He was put to the test when the LORD commanded him to sacrifice his son. Why did God do this? Didn't he already know what Abraham would do? Of course he did; yet deeds are not only the proof of

faith – they are also its substance. Abraham's faith became more real, more substantial, when he passed the ultimate test.

When we pass the test by acting in obedient faith, we are the spiritual sons and daughters of Father Abraham.

The second model is Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute. She lived in Jericho as the Israelites began to take possession of the Land of Promise.

Joshua sent two operatives into the city, and God led them to Rahab's house. She told them that YHWH is {Josh 2:11, 9} **"God in heaven above and on the earth below,"** and that he was about to give Canaan to Israel.

Her fledgling faith was immediately put to the test. Someone reported the spies to the king, and he commanded Rahab to turn them over.

This was the moment of truth. Was Rahab's faith profitable and alive? Would it take shape in action?

The answer was a resounding "Yes." At the risk of execution as a traitor she misdirected the Jericho soldiers, hid the spies, gave them life-saving information, and lowered them over the city walls with a rope.

Later, when Jericho was destroyed, Rahab's life was spared. Not only so Matthew {1:5} identifies her as an ancestor of Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Rahab's faith saved her and helped to prepare the way for Christ Jesus to save us.

When we pass the test by acting in obedient faith, we are the spiritual sons and daughters of Mother Rahab.

But what will our “test” look like? What kinds of actions are the evidence and substance of faith?

✎ First and foremost, deeds of *αγαπε* [agape] love are the evidence and substance of faith.

■ In verses 15-16 James provides a negative example: **“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?”** The Greek literally says, “What is the profit?” The answer is obvious: it is of no benefit whatsoever.

○ Saving faith is embodied in deeds of compassion, mercy, and justice. We have already seen this in 1:27: **“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.”** We have seen it in 2:1-4 where James instructs us not to show favoritism to the rich and powerful. We have seen it in 2:8 where James assures us, **“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right.”** We will see it again in 5:1-6 where he warns rich oppressors that **“the cries of [their underpaid workers] have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.”**

This emphasis is not original with James. It comes directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, (Mt 22:37-40) who interpreted and perfected the Old Testament Law through the lens of the love commands.

✎ Perseverance is the evidence and substance of faith.

○ Saving faith is embodied in stability when the pressure is on. We have already seen this in 1:2-7 and 12 where James focuses on trusting God in times of trial, which can include everything from illness to poverty to persecution by nonbelievers. We have seen it in 1:13-15 where James zeroes in on resisting temptation. We will see it again in 5:7-11 where James counsels us to follow the example set by the prophets who suffered for their obedience.

✎ Self-control is the evidence and substance of faith.

○ Saving faith is embodied in a body and tongue that reveal the righteous character of God. We have already seen this in 1:19-21, where James instructs us to control our anger and to **“get rid of all moral filth.”** We have seen it in 1:26-27, where James advises us to **“keep a tight rein on [our] tongues”** and declares that the **“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this... to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”** We will see it again in chapter 3 where James devotes 12 whole verses to the absolute necessity of controlling our tongues. In 3:13-18 he will turn to the theme of controlling our ambition. In 4:1-3 the subject is controlling sinful desires, and so on.

A living, saving faith has more substance and evidence than this. But self-control, perseverance and,

above all, deeds of *αγαπε* love are the beating heart of a living faith.

Is our faith real?

Is our faith profitable to God, to us, to our brothers and sisters, to our neighbors?

Is ours a saving faith?

In the judgment, may the Lord of the Church find solid-rock substance and overwhelming evidence of the faith that he blesses.