

I. Bible Memory Verses

- A. *James 1:2, 3: My brethren, count it all joy when...*
- B. *James 1:17: Every good gift and every perfect gift is from...*
- C. *James 1:19, 20: So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to...*
- D. *James 2:12: So speak and so do as...*

II. Introduction

- A. Back in my youth pastor days, when I lived in Chicago, back when dinosaurs roamed the earth, and the earth's crust was still hardening, I was in charge of our clubs for kids called Awana. We had about four hundred kids and about a hundred leaders. We also had a small church, of about 300 people. Our church didn't have much money, so our clubs had to be self-sustaining.
- B. The way we did this was through a candy bar sale. Every year, we had our Awana kids sell candy bars for a dollar. There was a Safeway coupon worth a dollar on the wrapper, so kids camped out at Safeway and had all these easy sales.
- C. We made that money last through the whole year. (By the way, that's not how we do things at Neighborhood... just to be clear.)
- D. Anyway, if a kid sold 60 candy bars, we gave them a jacket. We were pretty urban, and a lot of kids needed jackets anyway, so parents were happy. These were nice insulated jackets. They had our church's nickname on the back, which was The Center, which was short for North Side Gospel Center. The whole community knew us as the center. We had a huge outreach to kids.
- E. Over the years, there were hundreds of these jackets from the Center all around our neighborhood.
- F. And it wasn't just kids wearing the jackets. It was moms and dads.
- G. And it wasn't just Christian moms and dads wearing the jackets. Most of our club kids were not church kids. So their parents were not church parents.
- H. So it was not unusual to walk around our neighborhood, seen people getting drunk, getting high, cussing each other out, sporting our very nice jackets from the North Side Gospel Center.
 - 1. And now you know why we don't have bumper stickers. Have you seen yourself drive lately?
- I. What was happening was that there were hundreds of people naming our name but not living our lifestyle. In fact, they were the opposite of what we preached.
 - 1. Just because you wear the brand doesn't mean you own the product.

III. Spiritual Growth

- A. Early in the book, James writes:
 - 1. *But let [endurance] have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:4)*
- B. The burden of the book of James is that every Christian should reach their full potential. Mature and complete, lacking nothing.
 - 1. This is spiritual health. This is relational health. This is emotional health. Psychological health. Financial. Parenting. Marriage. Addiction. Dysfunction. You can be mature and complete lacking nothing.
 - 2. Later on James says to receive God's word, because it has the power to "save your psychology" as I am interpreting it (1:21).
- C. Whatever God planned for us when he gave us the new birth, we should reach for that. The Heavenly Giver of every good and perfect gift stands ready to fill our lives with more goodness that we can contain.
- D. So increase your capacity, James is saying. Grow big. Grow up. Grow strong. Grow mature.
- E. As we've gone along, we have been distilling each message into a concise statements. We call this...

IV. The Royal Family Honor Code

- A. This is basically things a grown up would say:
 - 1. EMOTIONAL OWNERSHIP: I take full ownership of my emotional state...
 - 2. MORAL RESPONSIBILITY: I take full responsibility for my moral choices and their consequences...
 - 3. SPIRITUAL INTEGRATION: I align my inner world and outer world with God's Word.
 - 4. VIRTUE LOVE: I love the people around me from the virtue, maturity, and character in my own soul, no matter what's in them...
 - a) Today we will add number five:
 - 5. #5. REALITY CHECK: I embrace a core reality called salvation, and I live it out in word, thought, and deed everywhere and all the time.

- B. Let's see how James develops that now.

V. *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? (James 2:14-16)*

- A. Well that jumps right into a boiling pot of hot water, doesn't it.
- B. In case you don't know, many Christians struggle with this book of James. The main reason is because it seems to contradict other parts of the Bible. It especially seems to contradict the parts written by Paul, another leader of early Christians like James.
- C. We will work through that. Because I want to show you that Scripture has no real contradictions, only apparent contradictions. And the reason for this is because all Scripture is equally inspired by God, and in his mind, every truth meshes perfectly with every other truth.
- D. So let's look at this.

- E. Here is James's argument. What good is it if you say you have faith but you don't have works? That's like telling hungry person, good luck, and not giving them food. In that situation, your words about feeding them don't match their reality which is hunger and all of that.
 - 1. What is he illustrating. He is illustrating a mis-match between your words and your reality.
 - 2. You're not walking your talk.
 - 3. You have failed your reality check.
 - F. Now, James puts a picture frame around this paragraph. He asks the same question at the beginning and at the end.
 - 1. What does it profit ?
 - G. And we have to ask "profit in terms of what?" Because if he is talking about initial salvation — what does it profit if you have faith but not works in terms of initial salvation — then we do have a real contradiction between James and Paul in Scripture.
 - H. But that's not what he's talking about.
 - I. He is talking about what the whole book is talking about: you being mature and complete lacking nothing. What does it profit for you being complete and mature if all you do is wear a jacket that means nothing to you.
 - J. Look at this:
- VI. *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! (James 2:17-19).*
- A. Okay, we need to define terms.
 - B. James says faith without works is dead.
 - C. What does faith mean?
 - D. What does works mean?
 - E. Well, he just told us what faith means in verse 19. For James, the word "faith" means whatever the demons do when they think about God.
 - F. Theology time.
 - 1. Faith and believe are the same word in the Bible.
 - 2. Like all words, faith has a range of meanings.
 - a) Faith0 = the stuff you know (mind)
"The Christian faith says that Jesus died on the Cross."
Called the content of faith.
 - b) Faith1 = the stuff you know and agree with (mind)
"I believe that Jesus died on the Cross."
Called passive faith.
 - c) Faith2 = the stuff you know and agree with and act upon (mind/will)
I believe in Jesus, who died on the Cross, as my Savior and only hope.
Called active faith.
 - G. So James has just told us which definition he intends for faith. He has told us by comparing this faith with the faith of demons.
 - H. Question. Which definition of faith would match the kind of faith demons have?
 - I. Answer? Faith1: They agree that God is one. But what is that? That is mental agreement with an idea, and no act of the will to follow it up. Even though the demons hate God, they still believe that he exists and he is one. Their faith is passive faith. Their faith is mental assent. They agree in their mind, but their will doesn't budge.
 - J. Remember back when James asked "what does it profit?" Yeah, well it doesn't profit. The faith that just agrees with a truth but doesn't act on it has no profit if your goal is to be mature and complete, lacking nothing.
 - a) For James, faith clearly means mental assent minus volitional compliance.
 - 2. The volitional compliance, James calls "works." People without that...
 - a) They go into the real world, wearing the jacket labelled Christian, but a reality check on any level proves there is no steady Christian influence in their lives at all. They might know a little about God, or a lot about God. It doesn't matter because they simply do not make choices to act on what they know on any consistent basis.
 - b) Are you a Christian? Yes. Twice a year at Christmas and Easter.
 - c) They fail the reality check, so they stay spiritually childish. That's James.
 - K. And this is all important because for Paul faith clearly means faith2, mental assent plus volitional compliance. And when people say the contradict it is just because they haven't done their interpretive homework.
 - L. Let's press on.
- VII. *But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. (James 2:20-24).*
- A. Again, James frames this paragraph, beginning and end. In both places he is talking about justification.
 - B. Compare this to Paul in Romans:

1. What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” (Romans 4:1-3).
- C. You can see why people get confused!
- D. But the confusion vanishes when you let the context be king.
- E. In context, Paul is talking about getting saved but James is talking about living saved.
 1. By the way, I believe James wrote his book long before Paul started writing his books.
- F. Salvation has three phases:
 1. Phase One: salvation from the PENALTY of Sin, instantaneous, the moment you first believe.
 2. Phase Two: Salvation from the POWER of sin, a process of growth throughout all your days.
 3. Phase Three: Salvation from the PRESENCE of sin, instantaneous, the moment you meet Jesus face to face.
- G. When Paul talks about faith and works and justification his laser beam focus is Phase One, getting saved.
- H. When James talks about faith and works and justification, his laser beam focus is Phase Two, living saved.
- I. How do we know? Because a) James already talked about the new birth coming down from God, in James 1:18, and b) he calls his readers “brother and sisters” which makes them already members of the family of God. Besides about a million other reasons.
- J. He is trying to get them to be perfect, which means mature. Grow up!
- K. So, what’s all this about Abraham?
- L. Abraham is an shining example of faith. James pointed to him, and Paul pointed to him, too.
- M. But they point to different events in Abraham’s life.
 1. When Paul talks about Abraham, he points to the day when Abraham first believed in the promise of God, and God declared him righteous, which means good enough for heaven. That is Phase One salvation, and Paul points to an event early in Abraham’s timeline. You can find this in Genesis 15:6.
 - a) However, when you come to James, it is entirely different.
 2. When James talks about Abraham, he does not point to the same day of initial salvation. No, he points to a day that happened sixty years later — the day Abraham offered his son, Isaac on an altar. The two events are sixty years apart (approximately)! You can find this in Genesis 22.
 3. Paul is pointing to the beginning of Abraham’s faith, Genesis 15.
 4. James is pointing to the end of Abraham’s faith — not salvation phase one, but salvation phase two, Genesis 22.
 5. All of which is to say they are talking about two very different things.
- N. For Paul, justification is a technical word for the beginning of salvation when God declares you righteous in his sight.
- O. But James is talking about a day sixty years later when Abraham justified his justification by offering up his son. We can just call that sanctification (Phase 2) and move on.
- P. How do we know?
- Q. Again, verse 22:
 1. Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? (James 2:22).
- R. His faith was made perfect, which means mature, grown up, whole, and complete. And that is the point.
- S. Make your faith mature.
- T. How? Have a core that you live by.
- U. All of which is to say simply this: if you want to be functional, if you want to be whole, if you want to be radiant and joyful and healthy inside and out, — meaning, if you want to be holy — then it is impossible for you to wear a Christian jacket whenever you feel like it, and call it good, and without ever living up to your claims. That is soul fragmentation. That is brokenness inside. There’s no core, but pleasing yourself. It is depressing, and hypocritical. It is, as James would say, childish. And it gets worse in chapter 4.
- V. James then points out something amazing and wonderful, and something that ought to correct a few praise songs that Christians sing.
- W. When Abraham offered Isaac on the altar — a story of extreme faith — two things happened.
 1. His initial faith was fulfilled.
 - a) James says, “so the Scripture was fulfilled, and Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”
 - b) Back in my bodybuilding days (yes, don’t laugh), I had a workout book with a chapter on building your arms. The chapter was called “filling out the shirt sleeves.” Because the shirt sleeves represent potential, and when you build enough muscle, your sleeves are tight.
 - c) Your salvation phase one represents potential. Your salvation/sanctification phase two represents you actualizing that potential. You’re walking the talk. You’ve grown up enough to fill out the shirt sleeves. And that is the dream and desire and prayer for you.
 - d) Fill out your salvation. Reach for the stars. Go all the way you can with God. Don’t just wear the jacket..
 - e) The first thing that happened was that Abraham demonstrated an extreme maturity in the Lord and fulfilled his manhood as a saved son of God.
 - f) The second thing that happened was this:

2. *He was called a Friend of God.*
 - a) This is the equivalent of a spiritual medal of honor. This is the highest achievement of grace.
 - b) Now, there is a sense in which every saved person is a friend of God. We've all been reconciled to God, and we've all been brought from a position of alienation to reconciliation, so we are all, in that sense, friends of God, little f.
 - c) But this is something different. James is talking about a rare believer who reaches a notable height of maturity. A person who walks with God and talks with God and listens to God in his Word by the Spirit of God. A person whose heart beats with God's heart. A person who has feasted over and over again on the riches of grace. A person who rises above trials, rises above adversity, rises above the worst the pain machine can offer and the devil can spew, and says, God is my God, Jesus is my Savior, and his Word is my truth, and with that I am content.
 - d) Abraham passed the ultimate reality check. Like Moses. Like Job. Like Paul. Like Esther. Like Mary. Like Ruth.
 - e) That is Friend of God. And that is the level these spiritual mature women and men achieved.
 - (1) #5. REALITY CHECK: I embrace a core reality called salvation, and I live it out in word, thought, and deed everywhere and all the time.
 - (a) Jesus not just a jacket I put on when it's cold outside. He is not a buffet of options I can pick and choose. No.
 - (b) Jesus is my heart and soul and DNA, and he affects me every day in real time. That is maturity. That is my reality check, not to tell me if I'm saved or not, but to tell me if I'm growing or not.
 - f) James wrote this book to call you to that level of Christian maturity.
 - g) And I am preaching for that very same reason.
 3. Now, James underlines everything with a reference to a famous prostitute of antiquity.
- X. *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:24-26).*
1. Rehab is a great illustration of spiritual maturity for several reasons:
 - a) She was a pagan, not a Jew.
 - b) She was a prostitute, not a doer of good works.
 - c) She was a believer in the God of the Jews long before they ever got to Jericho. She had already trust him, saying, "*for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath*" (Joshua 2:11). So, she turned from idols to God and was saved, Phase One.
 - d) She embraced salvation as her core, and so protected the Jewish spies from death.
 2. She started a prostitute and ended princess with God. No matter how weak, how dirty, how immature you may be, you can still grow up a whole, wholistic, and have a healthy life by the power of Calvary's love all wrapped up in Jesus and his Word.
 3. As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith (mental assent) without works (volitional compliance) is dead also.
 4. All of which is to say, if your goal is to be mature and complete lacking nothing, you'll never get there just by wearing the Christian jacket.

VIII. Conclusion

- A. Christianity isn't just a label. Isn't just a jacket. It's a whole life operating system, and that is the only reality check where you won't drive yourself crazy, and it is the only way to be called Friend of God.

IX. Bible Memory

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- B. James 1:17: Every good gift and every perfect gift is from...
- C. James 1:19, 20: So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to...
- D. James 2:12: So speak and so do as...
- E. James 2:23: And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.