

# A Belief that Behaves: Faith that Works

By Haddon Robinson

Speaker 1:

Torrey Memorial Bible Conference, January 1980. This is tape number three in a series by Dr. Haddon Robinson entitled "A Belief That Behaves."

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Beginning at verse 14. This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. It was this passage that caused Martin Luther to write off James as a right stray epistle because he thought that James and Paul were throwing brickbats at each other across the back fence of revelation. And anybody who seemed to disagree with his friend Paul just automatically scored lower on Luther's list.

But this is the passage: James, chapter 2, beginning at verse 14. "What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but have not works? Can that kind of faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' and yet you give them not the things needful to the body, what does that profit? Even so, faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself.

"Yea, a man will say, 'Thou hast faith, and I have works.' Show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith. Thou believest that God is one now do us well. The demons also believe in tremble. But wilt thou know, o vain man, that faith apart from

works is barren? Was not Abraham our Father justified by works in that he offered up Isaac, his son, upon the altar? Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect or complete. And the Scripture was filled full, which set and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness, and he was called the friend of God.

"You understand that by works a man is justified and not only by faith, and in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works and that she had received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body apart from the Spirit is dead, even so, faith apart from works is dead."

Little boy was outside playing when his pastor came to pay a visit at his home. The youngster was unaware of the preacher's presence, and so he burst into the house dangling a mouse by the tail. He said, look with my eyes, look what I got. He said, I got a mouse. He said, I hit it over the head with a board and then I jumped on it and then I picked it up and banged its head against the steps. And then the little boy saw the preacher and he said, and then the Lord called him home. Now that youngster was doing mistakenly, but a great many adults do deliberately, that is, that he thought he could be religious by sounding religious. But somehow seeing him standing there in the middle of the living room dangling a mouse by the tail, he had reason to wonder if he really possessed the religion that he professed.

In somewhat the same way, thousands of men and women each week make professions of faith. Sometimes they come forward in an evangelistic crusade. Other times they join a Church on a profession of faith, and still other times they stand on testimony night to tell people that they are

Christians. But sometimes when you look at those people and see the dead mice hanging in their lives, you have reason to wonder whether they actually possess the faith that they possess.

And that was something that concerned this man, James. James is a realist. He is a man who insists on reality and religion. He's against Shan and show and pretext again and again throughout this book. He insists that belief must show itself in behavior, that doctrine must show itself in duty. And that is the basic emphasis of this passage that I read to you just a moment ago.

But before we look at this passage that talks about the relationship of faith and works, let me take just a moment to talk to you about the belief that saves. You see, there are many different kinds of belief in the New Testament, and only one of which really relates a man or woman to God. One kind of belief that you find in the Bible and is referred to in this passage is what you might call a belief about God or a belief about Jesus Christ. You see that referred to in verse 19, where James says, "Thou believest that God is one. Thou doest well, but the demons also believe and tremble." That little phrase, our belief that there is one God, comes from Deuteronomy six, verse four. It was the great central declaration of Old Testament faith. Hero Israel, the Lord our God is one God. That verse was to the Jew what John 3:16 might be to the Christian to recite that verse demonstrated that you were orthodox, that you believed correctly.

But James says, you believe that there is one God. You do well, but the demons also believe and tremble. It's quite obvious that the demons in hell are Orthodox, but obviously that they are not saved. It is possible for men and women to believe the facts of the gospel, to ascent to their

accuracy and truthfulness. And as important as those facts are, because our faith is a historic faith, that assent to the facts does not relate a man or woman to God.

When I was growing up in New York, I learned the great many facts of history. I learned, for example, that Christopher Columbus had discovered America in 1492. I learned that Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on April 15, 1865, by John Wilkes Booth as he sat watching a play in the Ford Theater in Washington. I took those facts and stored them in my mind. But if I were to discover that Christopher Columbus really didn't discover America, but instead it was discovered by America's vast Pucius or Viking before him.

While I would be a bit surprised, I'd simply rearrange my thinking. The discovery of that new information would not radically change my life. And so it's possible for people to assent to the great historic facts of Christianity to believe that Jesus lived, that he died, that he rose again, and yet not really come to a relationship with God and almost understand those facts are important. In fact, James says, you believe that there is one God. You do well.

James is no man to downgrade orthodoxy. He is simply saying that orthodoxy by itself is not saving faith. But a second kind of belief mentioned in the New Testament that goes a step beyond that is what we might call a belief in God or a belief in Jesus Christ. And again, I think that's referred to in verse 19, where James says, you believe that God is one, you do well. The demons also believe and tremble.

A few years ago, they took a survey of Americans on belief about God. They discovered that 88% of people who said they were Methodists believed in God, but 92% of Presbyterians said they believed in God. And something like 96% of Baptists said they believed in God. Well, if they had gone to hell and polled the demons in hell, they would have had 100% of the demons who professed faith in God. In fact, the profession of faith of the demons in hell would have gone beyond mere ascent for the demons believe and tremble. It's possible, you see, for people to have an emotional reaction to what they know about the facts of the gospel.

I have seen people in a Church meeting respond to an invitation. Hot tears chased themselves down their cheeks. And as I sat and tried to talk with them, it was almost impossible to get through their tears, to make them understand they were profoundly moved. But in the days and weeks that followed, they were not found with the people of God. It seems to me that their faith made no difference in their lives while they were moved by what they knew they had fallen short of saving faith.

Imagine that a disease was sweeping this community, a new disease, a rare disease. And Jess over here comes down with it. I see him and he's got all of the symptoms. And I say to him, Look, I've been reading in the newspaper and up in San Francisco there's a doctor who's been working with this disease, and I gather from the paper that he has found the cure. You ought to go up to San Francisco and see him.

So Jess staggers out to the airport and goes up to San Francisco and a day or two later comes back and it is obvious that he has been cured, but the disease is contagious. And so a couple of

days later you come down with the disease and Jess and I come to you to pay a pastoral call. And we say, well, you got it. Same symptoms, same disease. And I said, you know, I read about a physician in the newspaper.

In fact, Jess here went up there and he was helped by him. I'm confident that that fellow has got the cure. You ought to go. You two go up to San Francisco and a day or two later come back and you two are cured. Well, the disease is contagious. And towards the end of the week I come down with the disease. I am lying in my motel room groaning, and you and Jess come and you say, Robert, you got it too. You know about that doctor you read about, you know what he did. You see what he did for us? And I said, yes.

You say, well, go on up to San Francisco. I say, Well, I think I'll just take some aspirin and maybe some alkaline, treat it myself. Now, if I am talking about a fatal disease, I will die of the disease. For it's not enough to know about a physician, even to believe what I have read. It is not enough even to have a confidence in the physician, that he is able to do what I think he can do.

If I'm going to be healed of the disease, I must find a physician and put myself into his care and allow him to treat me, and only then will I be healed. Which brings us to the third kind of belief, not only a belief about God, a belief about Jesus Christ, or a belief in God, a belief in Christ, but what I would call a belief on Jesus Christ. I'm not quibbling about prepositions. I'm trying to make a point. But I choose that phrase, a belief on Christ, because in the Gospel of John there is a construction that takes the Greek word to believe *pasce* and combines it with a little preposition *en*.

It's like our word in and grammarians tell us that when those two words appear together, it denotes movement of the subject on to the object. It denotes a dynamic, a moving thing, so that you can say, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. It involves an understanding of the facts. It involves an emotional response, but it involves a committal of yourself to Jesus Christ, a trust in him, a dependence upon him.

Years ago, Dr. William Newell, noted Bible teacher, was holding a series of meetings in the city of Philadelphia. While he was there, he was talking to the elevator boy in the hotel about his relationship to God. And evidently the boy had been brought up in a Christian home, in a Christian Church. So every time Mr. Newell tried to get across the gospel to him, the boy would say, Sir, I have always believed that believe it ever since I can remember. But Newell recognized that the young man had not really come to faith in Christ. One day, as he was waiting for the elevator, a plan struck him. And when the door opened, the Newell said to the elevator, boy, Son, tell me, does this elevator go down to the coffee shop? I said, yes, sir, it does. Newell said, Fine.

That's where I want to go. Take me there. I said, all right, Mister. Get on. Newell said, no, though you don't understand. He said, when you tell me this elevator goes to the coffee shop, I believe you. What is more, I have confidence in you. I think you probably made that trip 10,000 times, and I'm sure you can take me there. And that's where I want to go. Take me there, boy. I said, Look, Mac, if you want to go to the coffee shop, you got to get on. And Newell stepped onto the elevator.

Boy realized, of course, that Newell was playing some kind of game with him. And as he stepped on the elevator, he said to him, I see what you mean. If I'm going to be a Christian, I've got to get on. Not just to believe about, not just to have a confidence in, but as John Wesley said, to cast yourself with a reckless abandon upon the Grace of God. Imagine that there is a three story building, and in that third story there is a boy. And in the middle of the night he Awakens with the smell of acrid smoke in his nostrils. He staggers from his bed, and he goes to the door and opens it, and he is greeted by a sheet of flame. And so he closes the door against the fire.

And again he staggers through the smoke to find the window and looks out into the Gray darkness. And as he does, a man down below says, all right, son, jump. And the boy looks down and says, But I can't see you. The man said, It's all right, son. I can see you jump. And the boy jumps into that man's arms. Now, it is a part of faith for that boy to know that that man is there. It is another part of faith for that boy to be confident that that man can catch him. But it is the essence of faith for him to jump into that man's arms. It is betting your soul that the word of God is true. It is to believe on Jesus Christ.

And when you make that decision, when you come with intellect, emotion and will and cast yourself upon Jesus Christ as your only hope, as your only Salvation, in that moment, your sins are forgiven. That moment you're joined to the timeless life of God. The whole of the Bible testifies to the fact that faith alone saves. The point that James is making, however, is this, that while faith alone saves, that saving faith is never alone, that saving faith is always manifest by works he demonstrates that thesis in a number of different ways.



Beginning in verse 14, he says, what does it profit, my brethren, if a man say he have faith but have not works, can that kind of faith save him? Now James is here talking about a profession of faith, and he is asking the question, how do you know a profession of faith is real? And the answer is that the profession of faith must show itself in works. Here's a man who says he has faith but does not have works. And James raises the question, can that kind of faith do him any practical good?

And then to illustrate the force of his question in verse 15, he says, if a brother or sister be naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," and yet you give them not the things needful to the body, what does that profit? Even so, faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. The illustration, I guess, is obvious. Here is a man who finds that his clothes are threadbare. That's what the word naked really represents, and it's a cold day. He comes to the home of a Christian, and the Christian opens his door, and the man says, I can't stand the biting cold, and I haven't eaten in a couple of days. The Christian says, I'm glad you've come. I want to pray for you. I want God's best on you. Be thou warmed and fed.

He slams the door in his face. Now what James is saying is that a profession of faith without works is as ridiculous as a profession of love without works. What that Christian in the illustration was doing is using the words of love, but he does not have the actions of love. And when you hear those words without the actions, you realize that the words are a mockery. Even so, James says, faith without works is dead in itself, because a profession of faith without works is as useless as a profession of love without works.

The second major argument that he brings to this thesis that faith alone says, but saving faith is never alone is not only does profession of faith without works do us no practical good, but apart from works, you cannot prove to yourself or anybody else that your faith is real. James picks that up in verse 18, where he says, Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works. Show me thy faith apart from my works, and I by my works will show thee my faith. Now notice very carefully the contrast in verse 18. James is not contrasting a man who says he has faith with a man who says he has works.

He is contrasting two men, both of whom profess to have faith. One man has faith, a profession of faith, and no works, and the other man has a profession of faith with works. It's not contrasting faith and works, but professions of faith, one that has works and one that does not. So he says, A man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works. Show me thy faith without your works, and I by my works will show thee my faith.

Suppose somebody comes to you and says, how do you know you're a Christian? I think that most of us would probably answer by quoting a Bible verse. We might say, Well, John 3:16 says that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. And I believe.

But suppose the questioner goes a step further and says, Well, yeah, that's all right. But the demons in hell believe that verse, what's going on in your life? That's not going on in the experience of demons. That's what he does. You see in verse 19, thou believest that God is one that is. You've got the right Bible verses. That's good. But the demons also believe that and

tremble. In other words, the test of your profession of faith is the answer to the question, what is going on in your life that could not possibly go on there were it not for your faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, when you come to that place where you realize that James is saying that faith alone says, but saving faith is never alone, one response you might have to that is, well, that doesn't sound biblical to me. After all, the Old Testament talks about believing God, and certainly the New Testament, Paul's writings are filled with the fact that we're saved by faith alone. So what in the world is James doing talking about faith and works? Well, James understands that reaction, and he picks it up for he says in verse 20, but wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is barren? But as I'm going to show you, that faith and works always come together, and he does that by giving us two illustrations.

One illustration from the Old Testament is in the life of Abraham, and the other illustration from the Old Testament in verse 25 is from the life of Rahab. The first comes from the life of Abraham. He says, "Was not Abraham, our Father, justified by works in that he offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" By the way, that is the translation. And notice it carefully, was not Abraham our Father justified by works in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?

Not when he did it. It was justified by faith in Genesis 15. But that was the demonstration of his faith in that he offered his son Isaac on the altar. You can see in what he did that the faith wrought with his works and by works was faith made mature, perfectly complete, and the Scripture was filled full. It said, An Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness, and he was called a friend of God.

Now, in Genesis 15, there is that great declaration that it was the custom of Abraham to believe God that was counted unto him for righteousness. This incident about the offering of Isaac came in Genesis chapter 22, many years later. But it was in that offering of his son that his faith came to full flower. Remember, Abraham, in his early life had the name Abram, and the term Abram. The name Abram means Exalted father.

So you can imagine that Abram, Exalted father, is sitting by the well curb in the village that was his home. And a traitor comes from Egypt, going north to Syria. He stops to draw some water, and the two men get into a conversation. Traitor says, "My name is Lemuel. What's yours?" Abram says, "My name is Exalted father." Well, that's fine, Exalted Father. How many children do you have?" Abram says, "Well, I don't have any children, but God gave me a promise. In fact, he promised that I would have all kinds of seed." My mule draws the water and sort of rides off, figuring the heat's gotten to the old man. He goes to Syria.

Maybe ten years later, he comes back again, rides through the same town, and there is Abram. So he goes up to him, says, "We've met before. Yeah. Your name is Exalted farther." Abram says, "well, not exactly. You see, since you were here, my name has been changed. God said, I'm going to have a seed as great as the stars and the heavens as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Changed my name." "What's your name now?" "It's Abraham. That means father of a mob."

Okay, great. "Abraham, how many children you have?" "Well, I don't have any children yet. I just have a promise that God gave me." "How old are you?" "Well, my next birthday is going to be 100." "How old is your wife?" "Well, she's younger than I am. She's 90." " Yeah, you're a father of a mob, huh? Fine." Off he goes.

But you know that when Sarah was 90 and Abraham was 100, God gave them a son. That boy Isaac, was the darling of their heart. In him, all of the promises of God were fulfilled, and 17 years passed. One day, God says to Abraham, "Abraham, I want you to take your boy Isaac, your only son. I want you to take him on top of the mountain that I will show you, and I want you to slay them." The scripture says that Abraham took that boy and took them up on top of the mountain and stretched them out as an offering and took a knife and raised it between heaven and Earth and was just about to slay his son. And God held his hand.

And the book of Hebrew says that Abraham soul believed the promise of God, that he believed that if he slew his son, God would raise that boy back from the dead in order to keep his word. Now Abraham was declared righteous by God in Genesis 15. This event took place decades later. Genesis 22. But you see that the faith of Abraham, that's what saved him, because we are saved by faith alone. That faith shows up in Genesis chapter 22. Because saving faith is never alone. The reality of faith shows up in our response to God.

He gives us another illustration that's in verse 25 and there he talks about rehab, and he says, and in like manner was not also rehab, the harlot justified by works in that she received the messages and sent them out another way. Interesting contrast, Abraham was a patriarch and Rehab was a

prostitute. Abraham was a man, rehab was a woman. Abraham was a Jew, a member of the Covenant community. Rehab was a Gentile and an outsider.

Abraham was at the top of the list of people and Rehab was at the bottom of the list. But she too was saved by a faith that works. Remember the story in Joshua chapter two? The spies from the armies of Israel had gone into the city of Jericho. They ended up in the red light district. Probably all strangers in the city ended up in that red light district. It's a great place to hide your identity. They came across rehab and rehab says to them, I believe that your God is the true God. We have heard the reports of him, and I believe that he is going to take the city. And in that moment of belief, Rehab became a Christian regenerate.

But the scripture says she took the spies and hid them and sent them out another way. If she sent them out the same way, they would have been captured and killed. She sent them out another way because she believed that God was God. Now she was saved by faith alone. But the point is that saving faith is never alone. She was saved by faith, but by a faith that works.

Now notice carefully that the works are the fruit of faith. If they are not the fruit of faith, then the passage becomes ridiculous. Often when people say, yes, you've got to have works, and you say to them, well, what works did you have in mind? They say, well, you may have to be baptized or you have to join the Church or you have to tithe. But notice carefully the works that are mentioned here. What was it that Abraham was asked to do? He was asked to slay his son and by nobody. Is that called a good work? What was rehab asked to do? She was asked to betray her country.

And you will listen a long time before somebody says to you, well, if you're really a Christian and you're devoted to God, well, the first thing you do is you slay your kid. The second thing you do is you betray your country. The only way that can become a good work is that if it's the response of faith to the word of God, because measured by ordinary standards, those things are not good at all. So you see, you are saved by faith alone. But saving faith is never alone.

Works are the fruit of faith. The summation of all of this is found in verse 26, where it says, for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so, faith apart from works is dead, that word spirit Newmark, can be translated breath. And I think for this illustration that's clearer as the body apart from breath is dead. Even so, faith apart from works is dead. Now I have a way of taking clear things and making the money.

I'm afraid I'm about to do that. So you're going to have to work with me and listen closely. Notice the force of the illustration. He says, for as the body apart from breath is dead, even so, faith apart from works is dead. Let me do that again. Whereas the body apart from breath is dead. So faith apart from works is dead. In the analogy, the body is equal to faith, breath is equal to works. We usually get that the other way around. We think of a works as what we see. But what James is talking about here is a profession of faith. And so he is saying, as the body apart from breath is dead, so a profession of faith apart from works is dead. Just as the presence of breath shows that the body is alive, the presence of works shows that the profession of faith is alive.

Pull a man out of a lake and discover that he has taken in a great deal of water. We're not sure whether he is dead or alive. And we begin to administer artificial respiration, and we all stand and watch as that rescue goes on. And then suddenly the person administering the respiration stops and the man breathes and we say, he's alive, he's alive. You see the breath and you know that the body is alive.

Here's a baby. It's born into the world. And in that moment after it leaves the womb, the physician takes that baby and there are no signs of life. And so he dips it into a solution of cold liquid and then warm liquid. And then suddenly the baby cries. Everybody relaxes. And they say, well, it's alive. The cry shows that the body has life, just as works show that the profession of faith is alive. You see, works energize the profession of faith and the presence of works demonstrate that the profession of faith is real. That's what James is driving at.

I believe that for most people in our culture, a profession of faith is like a clammy dead body. They have heard all kinds of talk, but when they see the reality of that faith at work, they realize that the faith is alive. Remember a couple of years ago, driving through Oregon. And it was near dusk. And as I did, I hit something.

I drove on a bit and pulled over. And as I looked back, there was a dog lying by the side of the road. I realized that I must have hit it. I realized that it was probably dead. But I went to that dead body. And as I got close to it, I jumped up and ran away. I stood there chewing on my heart. And I suddenly realized it's alive when people get a profession of faith. But then they see the reality of works. That as a way of taking that profession and making it alive and vital.



Startling changes everything for the person and for those who know him. Faith alone saves. But saving faith is never alone. Now, I don't want to disturb you unless you ought to be disturbed. So imagine that when I was up in Oregon where I spent three lovely years. That when I went down to Texas. I wanted to take a pear tree with me. It was great to be able to go out into our backyard and get these luscious pears. And so somebody up there gives me a small pear tree.

And they say, Robinson, take that down to Texas and plant it. And you'll have some pears of your own. So I take it down, I plant it. A season goes by, not much happens. Another season goes by. My friend comes to visit me. He says, "Robinson, you got the pear tree?" Oh, yeah. It's out back. We go out and still a kind of scraggly tree. We look at it, and down here I come up with one Pearl. An anemic looking pear. Couldn't even make pear sauce out of it. But that pear tells me two things, doesn't it?

It tells me, first of all, that the tree is alive. It tells me, secondly, that it's a pear tree. Often when people first come to faith in Jesus Christ. Their faith is so small, it is little more than a seed. What is produced in their lives may not be impressive to other people. But if the work is the work of faith, it shows two things.

Show that there is life. And it shows that it's the life of God. See, in this passage, James is not saying, Go out and work harder. What James is saying is, be sure that your faith in Jesus Christ is more than the profession of words. Be sure that it's real, that it's vital. Because that's what relates you to God. Faith alone. But the faith it saves is never alone. It demonstrates itself in works.

Two minutes. Do you have any questions you'd like to ask? Yes, sir.

I didn't hear, how what?

How can we go out?

In the whole book of James, James would say, for example, when you hear the word of God, do it as the response of faith. He's going to say in the next section, if you have a really genuine faith in God, it's going to show in the way you talk, it's going to change.

Instead of having bitterness, sweetness, It's going to show up out of that relationship. So that faith in Jesus Christ means an obedience, A submission to his word. And as you do that, that begins to produce its results in your life.

That's what we were looking at the other day. When you go through trials and difficulties, the way you respond to that Will demonstrate whether or not you really have a genuine faith in God, Because a genuine faith in God, James says, Will make you steadfast. And in the steadfastness under the discipline of trial, Then God will begin to bring graces into your life and all of the graces and death. So that's how he develops it throughout the book. Chapter two.

If you have a genuine faith in God, you will not be a Christian snob. That's the passage that deals with the gold ringed man. You will not make distinctions among people that are different Than the kind of distinctions God makes. Have I answered your question?

I'm not hearing your question correctly so that it seems to me that for different people, you will have different responses. For example, if you're going through a difficulty in your life right now, A trial, the way you respond to that Will demonstrate whether or not you have a genuine faith in God. If you allow it to make you hostile, angry, bitter, Then that may be an evidence of the fact that you do not live life under God's control.

If your values in life as he goes on in the next two chapters Are simply the values of the society and not the values that come out of response to what God has said. That may demonstrate that the faith is simply something you talk about, but it's not real.

There are all kinds of ramifications Depending on who you are and depending on where you meet God And what kinds of things that he lays on your life So that it has to do with the way you handle life, how you handle your relationships.

I take it that in the book of James It would mean that one thing you need to do Is to know his word. And the second thing you need to do, as you know his word Is to live in submission to it. And out of that submission, which is a submission of faith, It has a way of producing fruit in your life. It's okay. Any other questions?

Robinson. A Belief that Behaves: Faith that Works

It's time for lunch. Get dismissed.