



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

## **James 2:14-26** **New Revised Standard Version** **February 4, 2018**

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, February 4, 2018**, is from **James 2:14-26**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

**(James 2:14) What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?**

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as truly “our Lord” benefits us and should also benefit others. If someone claims to have faith in Jesus, but a faith in Jesus that does not benefit others, he does not have true faith and his faith does not benefit anyone. True faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and true love for God and others go together as two sides of a coin. It is impossible to have a physical coin with only one side; likewise, it is impossible to have true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ without true love for God and others. One type of faith that cannot save you is faith that does not love God and others and does not seek to obey God and serve others in the name and power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**(James 2:15) If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,**

The Apostle Paul wrote, “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints” (Ephesians 1:15). True faith in Jesus as Lord results in “love toward all the saints” (that is, “all Christians”). Saints are those the Lord Jesus has set apart to do His work. Works of faith express our love for God and others, and our desire to truly follow Jesus Christ as our Lord. Whenever true Christians see a brother or sister in Christ who needs clothing or food or has other needs, Jesus has a plan for His followers to meet their needs. In faith, His followers will seek to follow His plans to benefit others and lead others to faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

**(James 2:16) and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?**

A person, who says he is a Christian but is not truly a Christian or follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, might say to a needy person, “Just believe in Jesus and you will be all right. Jesus will meet all of your needs,” and then do nothing to help the person in need. James showed how unreasonable it is to say to a needy brother or sister in Christ, “keep warm and eat your fill,” when they have no clothes or food. A true faith in Jesus Christ will lead a true Christian to respond reasonably in love. A reasonable response in love might also include the Apostle Paul’s statement to someone who appears to need help: “We gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat’ (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Paul’s command might also apply to the person who says he has faith in Jesus Christ but will not do good works for others with faith in Jesus Christ.

**(James 2:17) So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.**

One definition of faith is mere “intellectual belief,” and this definition seems similar to the definition of faith that James is using. For example, most people have faith as an “intellectual belief” that the earth is round, but most people do not live daily with this belief as a part of their consciousness and make conscious decisions daily based on this fact. Before getting out of bed in the morning, few people say, “I must remember that my bed is on a round earth; I must do everything today in the right way because the earth is round, especially when I get ready for breakfast and go to work and do my job today.” In some sense the “intellectual belief” that the earth is round is a dead faith for most people: they do not think much about it. For part of the day, when astronauts are in space, they sometimes make decisions based on the fact that the earth is round, so their faith is not merely intellectual or a dead faith. They and others do works of navigation based on their faith and the observation that the earth is round. Likewise, Christians make decisions and live daily with the conscious commitment that Jesus is their Lord and they want to do His will that day: this type of faith is not by itself or dead.

**(James 2:18) But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.**

Mere intellectual belief without ever making choices and taking actions based on that belief does nothing to help anyone or show anyone anything about that belief.

Intellectual belief without good choices and helpful actions based on true faith in Jesus will do harm by sins of commission or sins of omission. True faith in Jesus will include intellectual belief that corresponds to reality, to what is, to sound biblical doctrine; for example, that God exists, that God created people in His image, that God is love and light, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world. Our choices and works reveal our intellectual beliefs and our true commitments. Consistently wrong choices can indicate a wrong intellectual belief or misplaced trust, no matter how much someone says they are a Christian. Doing good works in Jesus' name will show others our faith.

**(James 2:19) You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.**

God is one; that is reality; that fact is true; that is the way God is as one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When a person's faith regarding the true God is merely an intellectual belief, the truth will have no effect on the person's daily choices and behavior. Demons know that God is one and there is only one God; they know Jesus is the Son of God, and because of their choices and actions in spite of that knowledge they shudder at the thought, but they do not repent. Some with a faith that is mere intellectual belief have far less faith than demons, and they should shudder and repent.

**(James 2:20) Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren?**

Some have been taught and have thought that all they needed to do was express mere intellectual belief in some facts about Jesus to be right with God forever. But their "faith" has never shown by their actions that Jesus is Lord of their lives. James would have called a person who believed this "senseless," without reason and commonsense. Their faith is barren and does not produce the fruits or gifts of the Holy Spirit.

**(James 2:21) Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?**

When people make choices and take actions consistent with the revealed will of God and the Bible, the Word of God written, they are justified in their actions and right with God in their choices. God revealed to Abraham that He wanted him to offer Isaac on an altar. God's request and Abraham's decision to obey God showed his faith in God, and God saved Isaac from death. Because Abraham believed in the true God, he believed God and did what God told him to do; therefore, James said, "Abraham was justified by works;"

his works showed he had the right kind of faith in God as his Lord, a Lord to be obeyed and not just believed to exist; a God one should “believe and act accordingly” not just “believe in.”

**(James 2:22) You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works.**

Faith that is merely intellectual belief in God’s existence is dead, such a limited faith is without life and inactive. True faith in Jesus Christ as Lord over all of existence and Lord over your own life too will produce works that flow from love for God and others. When true faith achieves God’s purpose in daily activity and reasonable choices, that faith is “brought to completion by works.”

**(James 2:23) Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God.**

“Abraham believed God” means more than he intellectually concluded that God exists. Abraham believed and that led him to obey God; therefore, Abraham remained right with God. Abraham did not use his belief in the existence of God as an excuse to do whatever he pleased without regard to the consequences in relation to God. Through faith, Abraham so cherished his relationship with God that he was the friend of God. True faith in Jesus Christ always leads to a mutual friendship with Jesus Christ.

**(James 2:24) You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.**

Works of love flow from God’s love that He has poured into the hearts of all who believe Him. Through faith in Jesus Christ and love for God and others, Christians see what good works need to be done to help others and achieve God’s purpose. Those without clothing and food will receive clothing and food from those who respond in faith when God shows them how best to serve those in need (often on a case by case basis). When Christians take the actions God asks of them, they remain right with God and in a right relationship with God. They do things for God because they consider God their friend.

**(James 2:25) Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road?**

Works without love, works that only obey the law with the hope of earning credit and rewards from God, works that are efforts to do more good deeds than bad deeds so you can go to heaven, are not the works James commended or commanded. The Holy Spirit inspired James to understand that Rahab had come to “believe in and believe” the true God; therefore, she wanted to obey and serve God no matter what the danger might be to her. She had come to love God and His people; therefore, when God inspired her or told her to save the messengers she acted in faith and saved them. God had forgiven her for her sins because of her faith in Him, and by her obedience from love she remained right with God, even though she had not yet been taught the law of Moses. She was saved by her faith, a faith that led her to do God’s saving work.

**(James 2:26) For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.**

For a human body to remain alive it must remain indwelt by a human spirit—the spirit that goes to its place when the body dies. True Christian faith includes right belief, right doctrine, belief that the Bible is true as the true Word of God written, but this remains a dead faith if it is not accompanied by following Jesus and obeying God day-by-day because we love God, His Word that dwelt among us and His Word written, and others.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. What type of love should true faith in Jesus Christ inspire within true believers?
2. According to James, what unreasonable or senseless response does the person who says he has faith, but has no works, give to the hungry person who has no food?
3. If someone’s faith is nothing more than intellectual belief, how might that make a difference in the way they live? Can you think of some examples?
4. Hebrews 11 describes faith: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). What did this assurance and conviction of some of those listed in Hebrews 11 lead them to do?
5. How is faith brought to completion by works?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and [lgp@theiblf.com](mailto:lgp@theiblf.com).