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A0728 – July 15, 2007 – Jas 2:15-17 – Is A Dead Faith Still Faith

I want to begin with a quote from Dr. Tom Constable of Dallas Theological Seminary that summarizes my position on James 2:14. “In verse 14 James returned to his thought in 1:21–22 about saving one’s life from death. His point here was that faith is no substitute for obedience. Orthodox faith without good works cannot protect the Christian from sin’s deadly consequences in this life (i.e., a deadening of fellowship with God at least, and at most ultimately physical death; cf. 5:20; 1 John 5:16). That faith cannot save him from God’s discipline of him as a believer. Good works in addition to faith are necessary for that kind of deliverance (salvation).”ⁱ This is the position I’m maintaining. This position avoids falling into a logical contradiction as defined by Aristotle because we’re dealing with different aspects of salvation.

I want to give you another quote that might shock you from Dr. Joseph Dillow on the concept of “salvation in the Bible. “It would be difficult to find a concept which is richer and more varied in meaning than the biblical concept of salvation. The breadth of salvation is so sweeping and its intended aim so magnificent that in many contexts the words used defy precise definition. Yet these difficulties have not thwarted numerous interpreters from assuming, often without any contextual justification, that the words used invariably mean ‘deliverance from hell’ or ‘go to heaven when you die.’ It may come as a surprise to many that this usage of ‘salvation’ (Gk. *soteria*) would have been the least likely meaning to come to the mind of a reader of the Bible in the first century. Indeed, in 812 usages of the various Hebrew words translated ‘to save’ or ‘salvation’ in the Old Testament, only 58 (7.1 percent) refer to eternal salvation.”ⁱⁱ

This is not the only time the Bible teaches salvation by works. “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling;” (Philippians 2:12). Some people will never accept this but it is to their own detriment since they distort Scripture to support an insupportable theory. Also consider, “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. ¹⁰So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Galatians 6:8-10). Here eternal life is something that is reaped by good works. The answer in both of these passages is that they are not talking about being saved from the penalty of sin but being saved from the power of sin. They apply to phase 2 salvation, not phase 1.

James 2:15-17 Ἐὰν δὲ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι ὧσιν τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς, ¹⁶εἴπη δὲ τις αὐτοῖς ἐξ ὑμῶν, Ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε, μὴ δῶτε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος, τί τὸ ὄφελος; ¹⁷Οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔργα ἔχῃ, νεκρὰ ἐστὶν καθ’ ἑαυτήν.

James 2:15-17 But if a brother or sister is inadequately dressed and is in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “You all go in peace, keep warm and keep filled,” but you don’t give them the necessities of the body, what benefit is it? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it does not have works, is dead according to itself.

James 2:15-17 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? ¹⁷Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

An Example of Faith Without Works (Doctrine Without Application of Doctrine)

- I. Ἐὰν “if”
 - A. 3rd Class Condition – probability – maybe/maybe not
- II. δὲ “But”
 - A. Variant with NA/UBS
- III. ἀδελφὸς “a brother”

- A. One must first be regenerate before the needy can be considered
“a brother”
- IV. ἢ “or”
- V. ἀδελφὴ “a sister”
- A. One must first be regenerate before the needy can be considered
“a sister”
- VI. γυμνοὶ “inadequately dressed”
- A. “poorly dressed” “naked in comparison”
- B. Job 31:19; Isa 58:7
- C. Matt 25:36, 38, 43, 44
- D. Compared with the phrase “be warmed” in verse 16 signals
inadequate clothing for cold weather.
- E. Needing a coat but not having one
- VII. ὑπάρχωσιν “is”
- A. 3PPASubj
- B. **to be in a state or circumstance, *be*** as a widely used
substitute in Hellenistic Greek for εἶναι (BDAG)
- VIII. καὶ “and”
- IX. λειπόμενοι “in need”
- A. PPPart
- X. ὧσιν
- A. Variant with NA/UBS
- XI. ἐφημέρου “of daily”
- A. “ephemeral” “daily”
- B. *hapax legomena*
- XII. τροφῆς “food”
- A. ***nourishment, food*** (BDAG)
- B. not as important as life (Matt 6:25; Luke 12:23)
- C. provided by God (Acts 14:17)
- D. shared together in early church (Acts 2:46)
- XIII. εἶπη “says”
- XIV. δέ “and”
- XV. τις “one”
- XVI. αὐτοῖς “them”
- XVII. ἐξ “to”
- XVIII. ὑμῶν “of you”
- XIX. Ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ “Go in peace”

- A. A common Jewish farewell formula, offering a prayer or best wishes for the one who is leaving. It is often used as a signal of ending an encounter, of sending someone off, and therefore equivalent to saying “goodbye” to someone:ⁱⁱⁱ

XX. θερμαίνεσθε “keep warm”

- A. PMPart or PPPart
Probably a PMPart (see Net Bible) “keep yourself warm”
- B. From “thermos” “to warm” “to heat” (e.g. thermometer, thermal)
- B. The presupposition from this word is that they did not possess clothing fit for the cold weather. Apparently these people were cold and hungry.
- C. Variations in Temperature
1. Creation (Gen 1:14; Ps 104:19)
 - a. No need for clothing
 - b. Implies relatively stable temperature
 - c. Seasons
 - i. Seasons did exist (Gen 1:14)
 - ii. Seasons were distinguished by the sun, moon and stars (Gen 1:14)
 - iii. Seasons were temperature independent
 2. Fall
 - a. God cursed man
 1. toil (Gen 3:19; 5:29)
 2. sweat (Gen 3:19; 5:29)
 - b. God cursed the ground/nature (Gen 3:19)
 1. This slightly increased temperature variation
 2. Variation Still relatively stable
 - c. Long life
 - d. Protection from UV
 3. Flood (Gen 8:22)
 - a. God cursed ground (Gen 8:21)
 1. This increased temperature variation
 2. Variation still relatively stable
 - b. God’s Promise of Stability of Temperatures (Gen 8:22)
 1. Cold and heat
 2. Summer and winter
 3. Will never cease

c. Global Warming Debate

1. HVP

- a. Agenda of the Sin Nature
 - i. Create a Problem
 - ii. Convince others of the Problem
 - iii. Solve the Problem
 - iv. Earn Respect/Position/Power

2. DVP

- a. God's Word (Gen 8:22)
- b. God is Truth
- c. God in Control of Weather Patterns
- d. Variations in Weather but No Global Catastrophe due to Global Warming or Cooling

D. Variations in Temperature Presupposes Nature is Fallen

- 1. Nature is Not Normal
- 2. Nature is Fallen

E. James Expects Christians to Alleviate the Effects of Sin in the World

F. It got cold in Israel (John 18:18)

XXI. χορτάζεσθε “keep filled”

A. PMPart or PPPart

Probably a PMPart (see NET Bible) “keep yourself filled”

B. Presupposes physical limitations of man

- a. Human body needs food
- b. Human body needs water

C. James criticizes the “don't work...don't eat” mentality void of generosity

- 1. A genuine need not being met is James' concern
- 2. Perhaps widow, orphan or disabled (cf James 1:27)

XXII. ἐπιτήδεια “necessary”

A. **to being made for an end or purpose, fit for, necessary**^{iv}

B. Because of physical limitations food and water are necessary

C. No creature is self-contained

XXIII. τοῦ σώματος “the body”

A. the physical body

- 1. Has unique anatomy
- 2. Has unique physiology
- 3. Made in the image of God (Col 2:9)

4. Has needs
 - a. Maintain temperature (appropriate clothing)
 - b. Maintain energy (appropriate food)
5. If we have means we should provide needs (1 John 3:17)

XXIV. τί τὸ ὄφελος “what benefit is it?”

- A. Identical to beginning of verse 14
 1. Signifies the example directly tied to the principle in v 14
 2. Faith without works is no benefit
 3. The benefit here is for others
 4. The benefit in verse 14 is for himself
 5. Faith without works benefits no one
 - a. The man who had need did not have his need met
 - b. The man who could provide but did not is not saved (from the deadly consequence of sin which is, at the least, loss of fellowship)

XXV. Οὕτως “so”

XXVI. καὶ “even”

- A. Ascensive kai
- B. “in the same way”

XXVII. ἡ πίστις, “faith”

- A. Articular as in 2:14
- B. Objective use (i.e. “Christian doctrine”, “Orthodoxy”)

XXVIII. ἐὰν “if”

- A. 3rd Class Conditional – probability – maybe/maybe not
- B. The claim to be orthodox in Christian doctrine

XXIX. μὴ “it does not”

XXX. ἔργα “works”

- A. Application of doctrine
- B. Variant with NA/UBS in word order

XXXI. ἔχῃ, “have”

- A. As in 2:14 and elsewhere throughout the passage

XXXII. νεκρά “dead”

- A. What does “dead” mean?
- B. If you see something dead what do you automatically assume?

“**A faith...**that is now dead must have once been alive. Works keep faith thriving (**1 Pet. 1:5–9**). The absence of works brings death (James 1:14, 15) to faith (2:26).”^v

- C. *nekros* parallel to *arge* in verse 20
1. *arge* means “inactive, idle” not “non-existent. “Hort urges “inactive” as the idea here, like money with no interest and land with no crops.”^{vi}
 2. This confirms the presence of faith (i.e. doctrine)
 3. This can’t be a mere professing believer
- The Syllogism
- If inactive then present
 If present then not absent
 If not absent then not a mere professor
4. “dead” here means “inactive, idle, worthless, useless”, i.e. not being put to work
 5. If something is worthless its existence is assumed

“James was not saying that a person who responds to another Christian’s need, as in verses 15–16, shows that he has failed to exercise saving faith and is devoid of eternal life.”^{vii} He was saying that if faith is not accompanied by works it could not save a Christian from temporal death, which is at least loss of fellowship and at most physical death. “Dead” does not mean non-existent but inactive, dormant, useless (cf. v. 14). This is a very important point.”^{viii} “It has not usually been considered too deeply why James chose the term ‘dead’ to describe a faith that is not working. But the moment we relate this to the controlling theme of ‘saving the life,’ everything becomes plain. The issue that concerns James is an issue of life or death. (He is *not* discussing salvation from hell!) The truth which he has in mind is that of Proverbs: ‘Righteousness tendeth to life . . . he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.’ [Prov. 11:19; cf. Prov. 10:27; 12:28; 13:14; 19:16] Can a *dead* faith save the Christian from *death*? The question answers itself. The choice of the adjective ‘dead’ is perfectly suited to James’ argument.”^{ix}

XXXIII. ἐστιν

“is”

XXXIV. καθ’

“according to”

- A. *kata* with the accusative denotes the standard

XXXV. ἐαυτήν

“itself”

- A. The standard is faith “itself”, that is, Christian doctrine.

Doctrine without works is dead according to its own standard because doctrine itself says to apply doctrine. Thus, if we don't apply doctrine then we're not living up to the doctrinal standard we possess. Therefore, our own doctrinal standard we profess condemns us. Simply put, this is inconsistent living. James calls us to a vital faith not a dead one. He wants us to put our faith to work.

We can alleviate effects of the Fall by providing for others in time of need. The negative effects of the Fall set up the greater context in which we understand the importance of adding works to faith, application of doctrine to doctrine.

ⁱ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Jas 2:14.

ⁱⁱ 105. Dillow, p. 112, cf. pp. 187–94. See also Alfred Plummer, *The General Epistles of St. James and St. Jude*, p. 137; Martin Dibelius, *James*, p. 178; and W. Nicol, "Faith and Works in the Letter of James," *Neotestamentica* 9 (1975):7-24. For a short, popular treatment, see Robert N. Wilkin, "Repentance and Salvation, Part 2: The Doctrine of Repentance in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 2 (Spring 1989):14.

ⁱⁱⁱ Loh, I., & Hatton, H. (1997). *A Handbook on the Letter from James*. UBS handbook series (86). New York: United Bible Societies.

^{iv} Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. "Based on Walter Bauer's Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen [sic] Literatur, sixth edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker." (3rd ed.) (383). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

^v Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen and H. Wayne House, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), Jas 2:17.

^{vi} Robertson, A. (1997). *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Jas 2:20). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

^{vii} Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Jas 2:17.

^{viii} Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Jas 2:17.

^{ix} Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Jas 2:17.

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