



John's Schedule

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Vital Signs of Living Faith



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God commands each of us this morning to ask ourselves a series of questions. These questions are all targeting the one very most important issue of all—the reality of our eternal destination. As we turn to [II Corinthians 13:5](#), Listen to what God commands us two times in this one verse, to be asking ourselves this morning:

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. NKJV

Do you remember Christ's warnings about one of Satan's methods in [Matthew 13:24-30](#)? Jesus described an ongoing, covert (at night), campaign by Satan, to imitate and fake God's work, by secretly sowing a crop of false followers of Jesus.

Beware of Christian Look-A-Likes

Because this Satanic campaign to infiltrate Christ's Church by "Christian look-a-likes" is ongoing, God commands every person who testifies that they belong to Christ, to do a spiritual self-examination; and look for the evidence of genuine, healthy faith.

At the end of Christ's greatest, and longest message we call the Sermon on the Mount in [Matthew 7:21-23](#), Jesus warned that there will be many within Christ's visible church who were convinced that they had genuine faith, but did not. Let's stand and read Christ's sobering words together this morning:

Matthew 7:21-27 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.22 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' NKJV

Just before we examine some of the symptoms of those who have "dead faith" in Christ's church, we need to work through the vital signs of "living faith".

Vital Signs of Living Faith

These are some key questions that we should ask and answer for ourselves as an obedient response to the clear command of [II Corinthians 13:5](#). Why not prayerfully ponder these questions not only with me now, but at another time, just by yourself and the Lord this week [\[1\]](#)?

1. **True believers are "sin-confessors" ([1 John 1:9](#)).** Can you describe a time when you honestly realized you were a sinner and confessed this to yourself and to God?

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. NKJV

2. **True believers are "sin-forsakers" ([Psalm 38:18](#); [John 8:11](#)).** Can you describe a time when your heart stirred you to flee to Christ as the only escape from the wrath to come? Has your heart ever seriously grieved over the gravity of your personal sins that you agree with God that you have committed? Did you sincerely repent of your sins and turn from them? Or do you secretly love sin and want to enjoy it?

Psalm 38:18 For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin. NKJV

3. **True believers are “forgiveness-holders” (Acts 13:38-39).** Have you truly understood the Gospel of grace? That Christ died in your place, took your sins, and arose from the grave having fully satisfied God’s wrath against your sins? Have you understand and confessed that you cannot save yourself? Listen to these powerful, hope-giving words, recorded in [Acts 13:38-39](#).

"Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man [Jesus Christ] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and in him **everyone who believes is justified from everything** from which you could not be justified in the law of Moses" (personal translation).

All true believers have complete forgiveness with all sins wiped away, even the deepest, darkest, and blackest; because all true believers have justification in Christ, His declaration of righteousness, over against every kind of sin we have ever done. How does He do this? The perfect life and death of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, pardons all debts and provides all righteousness for everyone who believes. The net result for each of us is that we who have been forgiven much, Jesus said, will love much ([Luke 7:47](#)).

4. **True believers are “Christ-clinging” (Galatians 2:20; John 17:3).** Are you presently clinging to Christ and trusting in Him alone, for your salvation? Can you describe to others a living relationship that you enjoy with Him through His Word and in His Spirit?

[Galatians 2:20](#) “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave Himself for me.** NKJV

5. **True believers are “endless-life-possessors” (Hebrews 7:16; I Timothy 4:15; II Peter 3:18).** Can you identify how Christ has changed your life? Are you seeking to daily maintain good works, or are your works occasional and weak? Do you seek to grow in the things of the Lord? Can others tell that you have been with Jesus?

[John 3:16](#) “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **should not perish but have everlasting life.** NKJV

6. **True believers are “Gospel-givers” Acts 5:20).** Do you desire to share Christ with others? Or are you ashamed of Him?

[Acts 5:20](#) “Go, stand in the temple and **speak to the people all the words of this life.**” NKJV

7. **True believers are “fellowship-seekers” (Hebrews 10:24-25).** Do you enjoy the fellowship of God’s people?

[Hebrews 10:24-25](#) And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,²⁵ **not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.** NKJV

8. **True believers are “worship-givers” (Philippians 3:3).** Is worship a delight to your heart? Does the scene in Heaven around God’s Throne, of unending worship tug at your heart and often draw you like a magnet? Do you long to dwell in His Presence?

[Philippians 3:3](#) For we are the circumcision, **who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,** NKJV

9. **True believers are “Christ-waiters” (I Thessalonians 3:13).** Are you seeking each day to be ready for the Lord’s return? Or will you be ashamed when He comes for you?

[I Thessalonians 3:13](#) so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. NKJV

Each believer is uniquely born again into the family of God; but all are saved the same way—by God’s grace through faith only in Christ’s ability to take their sin upon Himself. Experiences will differ, some words will not be the same, and degrees of sanctification are always present—but the essence will always be there.

[Titus 2:2](#) introduces us to a trio of Christian virtues that always travel together. They do not function alone. Grace-energized men (and all believers) who have sound, or healthy faith will be pursuing the cultivation of these virtues all their earthly lives.

Grace-energized Men Have Sound/Healthy Faith

Sound faith is only the first quality of a triad that must be present in any mature believer’s life. This word ‘sound’ describes in its full, whole and proper sense, what God describes as best for a person. It means that nothing is left from it. Obviously, this use of it should alert us to the fact that some have a less than complete faith.

Healthy faith must be whole. The problem of unhealthy faith is that it may be partial, incomplete, and lacking. If a person’s faith is never brought to health, if it stays incomplete—it will turn out to be defective in the end as Christ’s words in Matthew 7 warn. A person may believe correct doctrine (as the Pharisees), and be involved heavily in God-related ministry (as the Sadducees), and even do their work and ministry in the Name of Jesus ([Matthew 7:21-24](#))—but still not possess saving faith.

Doctrinally, a merely human Jesus can’t save, He is God the Son. An unrisen Christ Jesus,

can't save, He was raised from the dead by the power of God the Father.

Practically John's epistles say that if a person doesn't possess God's love within ([I John 3:14-15](#); [4:8](#)), that pours out ([Romans 5:5](#)) of our hearts and lives into love of all other believers, then that person is not truly saved ([I John 4:7-11](#)).

Jesus warned explicitly that "many" would have an incomplete faith. Whenever God's Word expressing His desires for our behavior and beliefs does not affect our thoughts, minds and attitudes, we can say that faith is unhealthy, it is not sound. It is defective [2].

If God's Word does not prompt our purity on earth, that faith can't assure us that we'll have Christ's righteousness at His return either in the clouds or to our death bed.

That brings us to James 2, one of the clearest portions of God's Word about living faith vs. dead faith.

James here writes to this perhaps earliest, local assembly of believers. This is Christ's earthly brother, now as a pastor of the "home church", the genuine "First" church in Jerusalem. From the start Christ's church has faced those who want the benefits of salvation but do not want to bow the knee and live the life. Because of that James gives us three clear descriptions of faith. Two are bad, and are unable to save sinners from eternal death. The final one is God's goal for each of us faith-examiners this morning.

Beware of Mere Intellectual Faith James 2:14-17

Intellectual Faith is dead faith because it can't change the heart; and touches only the intellect. This form of dead faith is illustrated in [James 2:14-17](#). This is faith that talks but never does. These "Christian look-alike" can pray and talk about God, but their hearts are not changed.

James uses the simple test of compassion. If a poor believer shows up at church obviously in need, and those who realized this need and do nothing—God says their faith is dead.

As a Christian we are to be doing good, to everyone we can, especially believers ([Galatians 6:10](#)). And when we do so, Jesus said it is just like we fed and clothed Him ([Matthew 25:40](#)). John emphasized salvation changes our self-focused hearts into hearts of compassion like Christ as an evidence of true believers. Look at what he says in [I John 3:17-18](#):

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and truth" (I John 3:17-18, NIV).

Literally, the question in [James 2:14](#) reads, "Can that kind of faith save him?" What kind of faith is God talking about? Dead faith that is never seen in good works. And what is the answer to can that kind of faith save anyone? The answer is no!

Saving faith is life-changing faith. If there is not a changed life and resultant good works, that profession is a false profession. That kind of faith is dead faith. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" ([James 2:17](#)). The word alone in [James 2:17](#) simply means "by itself." True saving faith can never be by itself: it always brings life, and life produces good works."

Over 400 years ago, the great Geneva pastor, John Calvin, wrote in his commentary on James, "It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone."

Beware of Mere Emotional Faith James 2:18-19

Emotional Faith is described by James as a form of dead faith that people share with demons. Demons have strong faith that is intellectual and emotional. Note [James 2:18-19](#).

To illustrate this mere emotional faith that is also dead, James uses one of the most unbelievable comparisons. He explains the inner workings of the spirit world. Only here do we see applied, what the Gospels so clearly illustrate—the complete intellectual and emotional faith of demons that can never save them.

It may shock you, but God's Word testifies that demons have faith! What do they believe?

1. **Demons completely believe in the reality of God.** They have no doubts. They have seen the Lord, seen His Throne, know all about the spiritual world, and have met Jesus Christ personally. Demons could never be classified as either atheists or agnostics. They had an accurate faith in God intellectually, in their minds. You can believe all the correct facts and not be saved.
2. **Demons completely believe in Deity of Christ.** Demons trembled in Christ's presence while He walked the Earth. They have no doubts about who He really is. Often we hear the demons publicly stating to Jesus, "I know who You are" ([Mark 5:7](#)). Mark records Peter's eyewitness report that whenever demons met Christ on earth, they fell down and affirmed He was God the Son ([Mark 3:11-12](#)). Demons had an emotional response to their faith, they feared, shuddered, and trembled.
3. **Demons completely believe in the Supreme Power Christ held over their destiny.** They even would plead for some leniency, or mercy from Jesus Christ as the ultimate Judge who held their eternal destiny in His Hands ([Mark 5:1-13](#)). Demons had a firm intellectual faith.
4. **Demons completely believed in Hell and the horror of eternal**

- punishment.** They knew and testified to people that they believed in the existence of a place of punishment, and knew that they were headed towards torment (Mark 5:7), and said that they didn't want to go there "before the time" (Matthew 8:39). Demons had a firm emotional faith.
5. **Demons completely believe in submission to God's Word.** They never expressed doubt that His Word was true, and they usually instantly obeyed, though a few did one final shake of their victim, or convulsion just to show their malignant hearts. So as James repeats, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (James 2:19, NIV). Believing to the point of fear and trembling does not save. Only a life-changing faith, produced by God within, can save.

Now we need to apply this sermon James has just preached to our lives today.

First, an intellectual agreement or assent doesn't save us. That is James' point—intellectual belief is present in demons.

Second, an emotional response, coupled with an intellectual response is also not sufficient. Demons had regular emotional responses to their faith in Christ as Creator, as Omnipotent Ruler, and as the Ultimate Judge. None of those intellectual and emotional responses prompted by their faith were sufficient.

Saving Faith is faith that is real, faith that has power, faith that results in a changed life.

Be Sure you have Vital Living Faith James 2:20-26

So what is sufficient, real, saving faith? That is the point James makes. Saving faith goes beyond intellectual assent to facts, and a resulting emotional response to God's Word—and continues into a life-transforming walk. True saving faith shows up over time in a changed life.

At the moment of responses all responses may look genuine. Simon fooled even the Apostles for a while (in Acts 8:13, 20-22), until Peter saw through the fakery and denounced him as an unrepentant charlatan.

Saving faith is always life-changing faith. Look back at what James repeats three times:

James 2:17, 20, 26: 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. NKJV

James as a pastor of this vital New Testament church pleads with them. Don't just assent to ancient truth passed down from the prophets, and now Christ's Apostles—be doers of God's Word from your heart and life.

Note the word that God uses, through James, to describe dead faith means "idle, unproductive, or barren". The idea is that nothing comes of it. Contrary to dead faith is the living reality of God's purpose in saving us. We were saved to do good works as Ephesians 2:8-10 states:

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. NKJV

Good works as the evidence of sound faith brings us back to Titus 2:2. Grace-energized lives are always characterized by healthy faith, and healthy faith always produces good works. Four times in Titus we see this emphasis from God upon the necessity of good works:

Titus 2:7, 14 in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 3:8-14 This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. 14 And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful. NKJV

Beware of dead, counterfeit, or fake faith! God commands every person who testifies that they belong to Christ, to do a spiritual self-examination and look for the evidence of genuine, healthy faith.

Vital Signs of Living Faith

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2. **True believers are "sin-forsakers" (Psalm 38:18; John 8:11).**
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7. **True believers are “fellowship-seekers” (Hebrews 10:24-25).**
8. **True believers are “worship-givers” (Philippians 3:3).**
9. **True believers are “Christ-waiters” (Thessalonians 3:13).**

Each believer is uniquely born again into the family of God; but all are saved the same way—by God’s grace through faith only in Christ’s ability to take their sin upon Himself. Experiences will differ, some words will not be the same, and degrees of sanctification are always present—but the essence will always be there.

However, these 9 questions can truly become a tool to allow each believer to do that spiritual self examination and say with David:

“Search me, O Lord, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24).

[1] Adapted and drawn from the James 2 portion of the electronic version of Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

[2] Faith is the key doctrine of a believer’s life: we are saved by faith (Eph. 2:8–9); and can only walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7); and God is not pleased with what we do except when we do all things by faith (Heb. 11:6); and finally anything we do without faith is sin (Rom. 14:23). Faith is the key doctrine of our life as a believer.

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