PERSEVERANCE

Do All Believers Produce Fruit?
Do All Believers Do Good Works?
Do All Believers Endure to the End?

G. Michael Cocoris

Many preachers preach, and therefore many believers believe that those who have genuine faith in Jesus Christ will *always be fruitful*, *always do good works*, and *always endure* to the end of their lives. Some believers may fall but will always return to the Lord and endure until their lives end. Those who are not fruitful, do not produce good works, or do not endure to the end did not have genuine faith; they had false faith. They are "professors but not possessors."

This is called the doctrine of perseverance. The questions that need to be addressed are: 1) Does the Bible speak about a false faith? 2) Are all believers fruitful? 3) Do all believers produce good works? 4) Do all believers endure to the end?

False Faith

Several passages are used to "prove" that some who profess faith have a false faith.

John 2:24 John 2 says, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them because He knew all men" (Jn. 2:23-24). Some interpreters say that although the text plainly says, "many believed in His name," these people had a false faith. For example, Calvin says they had a "cold faith, which was only the shadow of faith." He calls it an "appearance of faith, which hitherto was fruitless." The proof that these people had a false faith is that Jesus did not commit Himself to them. That raises two questions: 1) What is the meaning of the phrase "believed in His name?" 2) What is the meaning of "Jesus did not commit himself to them."

The phrase "believed in His name" only appears three times in the New Testament, all in the Gospel of John (Jn. 1:12; 2:24; 3:18). In the other two places where this phrase occurs, it is an expression of true faith. John 1:12 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children of God, to those who believe in His name." Receiving Christ makes one a child of God and receiving Him is defined as believing in His name, which means that the expression "believe in His name" is genuine faith. John 3:18 says, "He who believes in Him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." Those who believe in Christ are not condemned because they believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Believing in His name is true faith.

The objection to saying that the people in John 2:23 had saving faith is that they believed in His name when they saw the miracles that He did, but according to the Gospel of John, that is how it is supposed to work! Jesus said, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves" (Jn. 14:11). Thomas is an illustration of someone who had to see before he would believe. He saw and believed (Jn. 20:24-29). Concerning

this verse, the NKJV Study Bible states, "This was saving faith." The purpose of the sign miracles in the Gospel of John is so that people might come to saving faith. John wrote, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (Jn. 20:30-31).

But the text says, "Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (Jn. 2:24-25). If they had genuine faith, what does that mean? The Greek word translated "commit" in verse 24 is the same Greek word translated "believe" in verse 23. There is a play on words in the Greek text. They trusted in Him; He did not trust Himself to them. He did not have to be told what was inside of them. Jesus reads men's hearts like men read billboards. It has been suggested that Jesus not committing Himself to them means they lacked the courage of their convictions to confess Him before men. Consequently, they were not His friends (Jn. 15:15).

Govett says, "Our Lord did not trust these believers. Hence, some have concluded that their faith was not real. But is everyone who really believes to the saving of his soul trustworthy? … Could Jesus implicitly trust the twelve? Did they not all flee? Did not Peter cease and swear—'I know not the man?' The same class of persons is named in the chapter. xii. 42, 43. They believed without confessing Christ. Are all who do not confess Christ lost? They will lose reward because they own not Christ before man, but they will be saved because they believed."

John Gill says, "He did not take them into the number of his associates; he did not admit them to intimacy with him; nor did he freely converse with them, or make any long stay among them; but soon withdrew himself from hence, and went into other parts of Judea, and into Galilee."

To sum up, commentators claim the people in Jerusalem, who believed in the name of Christ when they saw His miracles, were not genuine believers because Jesus did not trust Himself to them, but the language that is used to describe their faith indicates that they were genuine believers. The fact that the Lord did not trust Himself to them means that He did not trust Himself to them as an intimate friend, not that they were not saved.

Acts 8:20 "Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet, He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' But Peter said to him, 'Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.' Then Simon answered and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me'" (Acts 8:13-24).

Most commentators conclude that Simon was not saved. Alexander says Simon made a "false profession." Bruce says Simon's faith was "superficial and inadequate." Commentators conclude that Simon did not have saving faith because of what Peter said to him later. Marshall says, "We need to read the rest of the story before we can evaluate his profession fairly." MacDonald says,

"From what follows, it seems that Simon had not been born again. He was a professor but not a possessor." That interpretation is based on a presupposition, not a legitimate interpretation.

Did Simon have saving faith? The text plainly says, "Simon himself also believed" (Acts 8:13). According to Luke, if a person believes, he is saved (Acts 16:30-31). That and that alone should settle the issue. Moreover, Luke says, "Then Simon himself *also* believed" (Acts 8:13). Inglis, a nineteenth-century author, wrote, "The word 'also' in the statement links Simon's faith with that of the Samaritans; and they, we read, 'believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.' And if you explain away that as other than saving faith, you make the Gospel itself of no effect and undermine the whole foundation of faith. Of what value are any of the promises to faith or any of the records of faith, if the testimony before us does not mean that Simon believed to the saving of his soul?" Philip thought Simon was saved. He baptized him! As Inglis points out, "Language could not be more explicit: 'Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.'"

If Simon was a genuine believer, what is the explanation of Peter's strong language? Peter told Simon, "Your money perish with you because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!" (Acts 8:20). "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (Acts 8:23). Simon was in danger of perishing. The Greek noun translated "perish" means "destruction, waste, loss, perishing." It comes from a Greek verb that means "to destroy, kill, lose utterly, perish," which is used *figuratively* of the loss of eternal life (A-S). Note these words are not technical terms for eternal punishment. They can refer to either temporal or eternal destruction. They are used for everything from wasting oil (Mt. 26:8) to eternal perishing (Jn. 3:16). Therefore, the use of this word does not necessarily mean that Peter was threatening Simon with eternal damnation. The question is, "Can 'perish' describe something that could happen to a believer?" The answer is "Yes." Lang argues that out of the nearly 90 times the verb form of this noun is used, only 11 are clearly a reference to hell. It is used 33 times of the death of the body (Lang; Mt. 2:13). In the context of Acts 8, the perishing of money is temporal. Therefore, Simon's perishing is the temporal perishing of physical death (Dillow). Inglis observes, "If his money and he were to perish together, the word cannot be stretched beyond a temporal calamity" (Inglis).

In Hebrews 11:39, this word refers to the physical death of believers. The writer identifies himself with his readers (see "we") as those who draw back to perdition, that is, destruction, the same word that appears in Acts 8:20. Those who draw back are in danger of a premature physical death (1 Cor. 11:30). Hebrews 11:39 proves that *believers* ("we") can "perish," but that does not mean they go to hell.

In Luke 13, some told Jesus about "the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices" (Lk. 13:1). Jesus replied, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:2-3). The Galileans suffered physical death and Jesus said that those who did not repent would *likewise perish*, that is, they would suffer physical death.

Simon was bitter and in the bond of iniquity. Believers can be bitter (Eph. 4:31) and be bound by sin (Rom. 6:12; 7:23). Inglis observes that the bitterness and bond of iniquity "describe not the state in which Simon committed the sin, but the mood in which he received the rebuke; for 'bitterness' elsewhere evidently means irritation or displeasure, and the gall of bitterness would signify the heat of displeasure which brought the scowl upon his countenance and showed that the influence under which he had sinned was not yet dissolved" (Inglis, p. 52).

To sum up, commentators conclude that Simon's sin proves he was not a genuine believer, but the text plainly says he believed. Believers are capable of doing what Simon did (wanting to pay for a spiritual privilege) and his possible perishing is temporal, not eternal. Terms such as "gall of bitterness," "bond of iniquity," and "perish" are strong words but not necessarily inconsistent with being a believer.

It is common for commentaries to conclude that when the New Testament says some people believed that they had a false faith because of something that is said about them *after* they believed, but it can be demonstrated that they are people who had real faith. Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, there is no such thing as false faith *in the New Testament*. That does not mean what some people call faith today is real New Testament faith.

At the same time, this is more than an exegetical or theological issue. It is an intensely practical issue because, based on this approach to the New Testament, some teach that people must look at their lives after trusting Christ to make sure they have real faith. That is dangerous. The test of real faith is not the results it produces in one's life. It is the *content* of the faith itself.

Fruit-bearing

No Growth It is possible for believers not to grow. Peter says, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and brotherly kindness love" (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Then Peter contemplates the possibility of a believer lacking these things (2 Pet. 1:9a). If a person lacked these things, which means they lack spiritual growth, does that mean they were never saved? No! Peter says, "For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins" (2 Pet. 1:9). In other words, believers can forget they were forgiven and not grow.

No Fruit It is possible for believers not to produce fruit. Peter speaks of believers being "unfruitful" (1 Pet. 1:8). The Parable of the Sower teaches that more believers fail than reach maturity. It is popular to say that of the four soils, only the fourth represents believers because only the fourth produces fruit, but that is not what the parable teaches. In the first place, the seed germinates in the last three types of soil, indicating life, the new birth. More specifically, Luke's version indicates that the last three types of soil represent the people who have been saved. Jesus explains that the seed that fell by the wayside was taken away "lest they believe and be saved" (Lk. 8:12). Notice that according to that verse, if you believe, you are saved. The seed that fell on the rock represents those who believed (Lk. 8:13), which means they were saved. Some argue that they were not saved since they only believed "for a while and in time of temptation fell away" (Lk. 8:13). That interpretation necessitates that to be saved, one must believe and endure, but the passage itself says that all that is necessary to be saved is to believe. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who "bring no fruit to maturity" (Lk. 8:14). The fact that they are said to not go to maturity indicates that they were saved. Only the seed that fell on the good ground produces fruit (Lk. 8:15), but even among them, the fruit-bearing was inconsistent. Some only produced fruit thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, and only a relative few, a hundredfold (Mt. 13:23). This parable clearly teaches that believers can be unfruitful. Of the four types of people, three were believers and out of the three who were believers, only one was fruitful.

The objection is that Jesus said, "By your fruits, you shall know them." Does that verse mean that all believers always produce fruit? What Jesus said was, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their

fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?" (Mt. 7:15-16). Jesus is talking about false prophets, not everybody! There is not so much as a hint that Jesus intended for it to be applied to everyone. As France admits, it relates *specifically* to false prophets. The test of false prophets is their fruit.

The fruit is often taken to be their character, but as Robinson points out, "We assume Jesus was saying that we can identify good people by their good deeds, by the lives they live. But having studied so much of the Sermon on the Mount, we know that cannot be what Jesus was teaching. Some of those he singled out as being false prophets, the Pharisees and the scribes, kept all the religious rules and regulations. If 'fruit' means the same as 'good works,' the Pharisees would be the first to qualify for a metal of righteousness."

What, then, is the fruit test? The fruit of an apple tree is an apple. Likewise, the fruit of a prophet is prophecy (Robinson). Later in His ministry, Christ used this illustration and there fruit is clearly "words" (Mt. 2:33; see 12:32, 34, 36, 37). It should also be pointed out that fruit is that which is produced for the benefit of someone else. A true prophet speaks a word from God, which benefits others. A false prophet produces bad fruit. His message, not being from God, does not benefit others.

Good Works

The passage that is most used to "prove" that faith always produces works is James 2:14-26.

The Principle James asks, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (Jas. 2:14). In the Greek text, the second question indicates a negative answer is expected. Some commentators claim that the faith spoken of in verse 14 is not genuine faith that produces eternal life. They point out that the person "says" he has faith, and they contend that he is only a professor and not a possessor. Thus, according to them, when James asks, "Can faith save him?" he means, can *that* kind of faith, later revealed as one without works, save him? Granted, James says, "Someone *says* he has faith," but James does not mean to imply that this person's faith is not genuine. James addresses this passage to "my brethren" (Jas. 2:14, see also 2:1, 15), that is, people who have exercised saving faith. The issue in this passage is not true faith versus false faith. It is faith that is alone, meaning without works (Jas. 2:17), versus faith with works. Faith without works is dead, indicating it was once alive! (Hodges, who also quotes Nicol, Plummer, and Dibelius, who come to the same conclusion).

If the faith in James 2:14 is faith that produces eternal life, what does James mean when he says, "Can faith save him?" The word "saved" occurs five times in the book of James (Jas. 1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15; 5:20). Each time, it refers to the saving of temporal life, not the saving of the eternal soul. For example, "soul" in James 1:21 means "life." James 5:15 says, "The prayer of faith will save the sick." Thus, James is not talking about going to heaven. He is simply asking, "Can faith without works save a person's *life* from something?" The question is, "From what?" The answer is, "Save your life from being wasted and possibly save it from death." James 2:14 must be kept in context. James 1:15 mentioned physical death. James 1:21 spoke of saving one's life from the defilement, destruction, and death of sin. The Word is able to save your life (Hodges).

James 2:13 discusses the Judgment Seat of Christ. Now, James asks, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith and does not have works?" (Jas. 2:14). In other words, what *profit* will believers have, now and at the Judgment Seat of Christ, if they do not produce works? James further asks, "Can faith save him?" That is, "Can faith without works save believers from wasting their lives now and being judged without mercy at the Judgment Seat of Christ?" Without

works, life is wasted and not rewarded. The issue is profit. Will believers be profitable now so they can be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ, or will they be unprofitable? Believers are unprofitable without love (1 Cor. 13:1-3) and without works (Jas. 2:14).

James illustrates the kind of works he has in mind. He says, "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?" (Jas. 2:15-16). A believer (see "my brethren" in 2:14) comes upon a "brother or sister" (Jas. 2:15), that is, a fellow believer, who is naked and destitute of daily food. The Greek word rendered "naked" means "without an outer garment." Instead of providing for these physical needs, the believer says, "Depart in peace," which was the normal Jewish greeting of the day. It would be something like a believer today saying, "God bless you," or "Have a good day." The believer goes on to say, "Be warmed and be filled," but does nothing to help. In other words, the works James has in mind are labors of love (Jas. 1:27, 2:12) and acts of mercy (Jas. 2:13).

James concludes his illustration with a question, "What does it profit?" (Jas. 2:16). This is not a reference to the profit to the needy. James asks, "What profit is there for the *believer* who saw the need?" He began (Jas. 2:14) with that question. Moo observes, "Not only do the empty words of the 'believer' do no good for these others; they bring no spiritual 'profit' to himself either." If *believers* feed and clothe the needy and have good works, *they* profit now and at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

James concludes, "Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas. 2:17). Faith without works is dead. Dead faith is still faith. A dead battery is still a battery. If it is dead, it was once alive. Dead faith is faith without works. It is a faith that is not working; it is "ineffectual, unproductive" (Hodges). Dead faith is a faith that has no life, that is, no ability to profit, no ability to save from a wasted life and no ability to be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Something can be alive and yet described as dead (Lk. 15:24, 32; Rom. 4:19; Rom. 7:8 and 5:13; Rev. 3:1). In English, to say that an idea is "dead" means that it is not working (Hodges).

The great theological question posed by this passage is, can a dead faith (a genuine faith without works) get one to heaven? The emphatic answer of the New Testament is yes! Paul says, "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, Paul teaches that all of a person's works can be burned at the Judgment Seat of Christ. He will suffer a loss of reward, but, in the words of the apostle Paul, "He himself will be saved yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). James would call that man's faith a dead faith; it was faith without works. So, faith without works is able to get you to heaven. Romans 4:5 and 1 Corinthians 3:15 prove that. Faith without works is dead; it is not able to get you rewarded. The point is that faith without works is unprofitable.

Protester At this point in the passage, James introduces an objector. "But someone will say" (Jas. 2:18). This person has been called an ally (Moo), but it is clear that he is no ally of James because James calls him a foolish man (Jas. 2:20). Furthermore, the formula "someone will say" was used in classical Greek and in the New Testament to introduce an opposing opinion (1 Cor. 15:35; see Mayor for examples in classical Greek). Apparently, this was a standard literary format for an author who wished to present and refute an opponent's point of view (Rom. 9:19-20).

What is the objection of the objector? He says, "You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (Jas. 2:18). There is a manuscript problem in this verse. Although a few manuscripts do contain the word "without," the vast majority of Greek manuscripts have a Greek word (*ek*) which is translated "out of." That change, however, produces a problem because it makes the objector sound like he is saying the

same thing twice instead of two different things ("Show me your faith *out of* your works, and I will show you my faith by my works"). What is his objection?

Granted that following the correction mentioned above, there is no apparent difference in the two statements in English, but in the Greek text, there is. In Greek, the objector changes the order of words. In one, he starts with faith. In the other, he starts with works. In other words, the objector seems to be saying, "You start with faith and show me works. I'll start with works and show you faith." What he is saying is, "I don't believe either one of us can do it because I don't think there is any relationship between faith and works."

Hodges explains it like this, "The underlying assumption is, of course, that neither of these things can be done. The argument is virtually a *reductio ad absurdum* [reduction to absurdity] in the eyes of James' interlocutor. After all, who could ever take a set of deeds, however noble they might be, and show from them his creed? One must *say* he has faith (compared with 2:14) even when his works are lacking. Yet, impossible though it would seem to be to 'act out' one's faith by any conceivable set of deeds, the objector (in irony) offers to do it provided James, starting with some statement of his faith, can show how such faith is reflected in works. But though it is the easier of the two tasks, James cannot even do this much. His opponent is quite sure" (Hodges, "Light on James Two from Textual Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, p. 348). According to this interpretation, the objector says there is no connection between faith and works (Hodges). That explanation fits James' answer to the objector in verse 20, where he contends that faith was "working together" with Abraham's works.

The objector continues in verse 19 (Mayor; Hodges). That is obvious from the fact that James does not begin his response until verse 20. The objector says, "You believe there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (Jas. 2:19). "Do well" does not mean, "I congratulate you." It means you do good works (see 3 Jn. 6, where this exact phrase occurs, except it is in the future tense instead of the present). In other words, the protester says, "You [James] believe that there is one God and you do that which is good." He continues, "Let me show you that there is not necessarily any relationship between faith and works. The devils also believe but don't do good works; they just tremble. So, you see, there is no relationship between faith and works." What the objector is saying would be like someone saying today, "Two people joined our church. Both of them had faith, yet one really went to work and the other did nothing except get emotional now and then. Therefore, I don't think there is any relationship between faith and works."

Proof James answers the objector in James 2:20-23. He begins his answer by saying, "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" (Jas. 2:20). In the Greek text, the word "man" is in the singular, as is the word "you" in verse 22 (Moo), but the word "you" in verse 24 is plural, indicating that James has turned his attention again to his readers and is addressing them (Hodges). James calls the objector a foolish man. The Greek word translated "foolish" means "empty, vain, fruitless." This has been paraphrased as "What a senseless argument!" (Hodges). Epictetus uses the word of a guest at dinner, who is actually somewhat ignorant but makes a great effort to impress his fellow guests with his supposed knowledge (Mitton). So it may be that James suggests that the opponent addressed here is not so much a genuine seeker after the truth but one seeking to impress others with his subtle cleverness. At any rate, James reminds this empty-headed objector that faith without works is dead (2:20). His proof of that follows.

The next verse contains the phrase "justified by works," which has caused a great deal of confusion. Did James believe in justification by works? And if not, why did he talk about a

justification by works? This thorny problem caused Luther to call the book of James "a right strawy epistle." Unfortunately, Luther did not realize what a friend he had in James.

There is no question that James believed in justification *by faith*, just as did his friend, the apostle Paul. James clearly says, "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Jas. 2:23). That is a quote from Genesis 15:6, the same verse, incidentally, which Paul uses to prove that justification is by faith (Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:3).

With that in mind, consider what James says to the objector: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?" (Jas. 2:21). That is a reference to Genesis 22:9, 12. The offering of Isaac on the altar took place years after Abraham was justified by faith. In Genesis 15, Abraham was justified by faith. In Genesis 22, he offered Isaac on the altar. The question is, "Why did he call the offering of Isaac justification by works?" The answer is that justification by works is *before people*. Paul says, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, *but not before God*" (Rom. 4:2, italics added). Justification by faith is before God. Justification by works is before people (Hodges). So, James is saying there is a relationship between faith and works. When you add works to faith, *people* can see you have faith.

The Point Now James insists, "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" (Jas. 2:22). James says faith was *working together* with works. That is his point to the objector. There is a relationship between faith and works. The two work together (Hodges). James not only claims there is a relationship between faith and works but also spells out the relationship: "By works, faith was made perfect." The Greek word translated "perfect" does not mean "without fault or flawless." It means "full-grown, mature." As Abraham worked, as he offered Isaac on the altar, his faith grew and matured. It was "nourished and strengthened" (Hodges).

Thus, by obeying God and offering his son Isaac on the altar, Abraham demonstrated that he really believed in God and was a friend of God. James adds, "And he was called the friend of God" (Jas. 2:23). Abraham is not called the friend of God in the book of Genesis, but he is called that in Isaiah 41:8 and 2 Chronicles 20:7. There is a difference between being a believer in God and a friend of God. Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do whatever I command you" (Jn. 15:14). So by the offering of Isaac, Abraham demonstrated he was not only a believer but a friend.

James has finished his reply to the objector. He has demonstrated that there is a relationship between faith and works. Works mature faith and, thus, they are profitable to the believer. Having established that with the objector, James now turns his attention to the readers (see the plural "you" in verse 24; Moo).

The Principle Turning his attention to his readers, James says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (Jas. 2:24). As has been explained, he means that faith is demonstrated before people by works and not just by saying, "I have faith." Notice he says, "*You* see," that is, *you,* the readers, you people see, not God. To say the same thing another way, there are two kinds of justification. Justification before God is by faith, and justification before people is by works (Calvin, who calls it "the double meaning" of justification; Darby; Hodges).

James gives his readers two illustrations. The first is Rahab, the harlot. He says, "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" (Jas. 2:25). How does anyone know that Rahab had faith? The answer is by what she did. When she had faith, she was justified before God, but when she received the messengers and sent them out another way, she was justified before people (see Josh. 6 for the story of Rahab). Note that her physical life was saved by her works (Hodges).

The second illustration that James uses is, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:26). To think of the body as an illustration of works and the breath inside as faith is to get this illustration backward. Instead, the way James uses this illustration, the body represents faith. How does anyone know that a body is alive? The answer is that it has spirit. It breathes. Its breathing demonstrates that the body is alive. Likewise, works demonstrate that faith is alive.

James concludes with the statement that he started with and has repeated throughout the passage: faith without works is dead. As Romans 4:5 and 1 Corinthians 3:15 so vividly demonstrate, a dead faith, that is, a faith that has no works, can get one to heaven, but as James contends, that kind of faith cannot *profit* now or at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Nor does that kind of faith mature or allow others to perceive its presence.

To sum up, faith needs works to be profitable, perfected, and perceived by others. God sees faith and says, "He is righteous." People see works and say, "He is righteous."

Endurance

Old Testament A simple survey of Scripture indicates not all believers endure to the end. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:8), but the story ends with him getting drunk and being uncovered in his tent (Gen. 9:21). Peter says God "delivered righteous Lot, *who was* oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7-8). Yet Lot offered his two virgin daughters to the homosexuals of Solomon in place of the visitors who were in his house (Gen. 19:8). Later, the two daughters got their father drunk and committed incest with him (Gen. 19:31-36). Reuben committed adultery with his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22). Judah visited a woman he thought was a prostitute (Gen. 38:15-18).

Moses committed murder (Ex. 2:11-12) and disobeyed the Lord (Num. 20:8-11) with the result that he was not allowed to enter the promised land (Num. 20:12)! The nation of Israel complained (Num. 11:1-35), criticized (Num. 12:1-16), and because of unbelief refused to enter the promised land (Num. 14:6-10). They ended up dying in the Wilderness. The Book of Judges records one failure after another. In the first 13 chapters of Judges, the phrase, "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord" appears six times (Judges 3:7, 3:12; 4:1; 6:12; 10:6; 13:1). There are more references to the Holy Spirit coming upon Samson than any other person in the Old Testament, but he was a womanizer (Judges 14:1-3, 10, 15; 6:1, 16:4), who broke the Nazirite vow (Judges), and committed suicide (Judges 16:30). Toward the end of the book, the phrase, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes," appears four times (17:6; 21:25; 18:1; 19:1). Saul visited the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:7-8). David committed adultery (2 Sam. 11:2-4) and then committed murder to cover it up (2 Sam. 11:14-15). Solomon was more of a womanizer than Samson (1 Kings 11:1-3) and, as a result, *ended up* in idolatry (1 Kings 11:4-10).

Granted, all of this is in the Old Testament, but remember, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). People in the Old Testament "become our examples" (1 Corinthians 10:6).

New Testament An unnamed man at Corinth had an affair with his father's wife! Paul told the church to deliver him to Satan "for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:1-5). In other words, he was a believer who sinned, did not repent, and died without repenting, but was saved. Hymenaeus and Alexander rejected faith and a good conscience to the point that "concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck" (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

Dimas forsook Paul because he loved the present world (2 Tim. 4:10). Diotrephes loved to have preeminence (3 Jn. 9).

A believer can end up with no eternally profitable works. Paul explains, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work, which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:11-15). This passage teaches that a believer can suffer the loss of all rewards yet be saved.

Summary: The New Testament does not speak of false faith; instead, it teaches that people with genuine faith cannot grow, bear fruit, produce good works, or endure to the end.

All of this is rooted in the fifth point of Calvinism, called "the perseverance of the saints." Calvinism teaches that since people are spiritually dead, meaning they are unable to respond to God, for them to be saved, God must *first* make them spiritually alive (regeneration) and, *after that,* He gives them faith. Therefore, people with this God-given faith will produce fruit/works and endure to the end (the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints) and people who do not have faith/works/endurance to the end do not have genuine God-given faith. They have false faith; they were never saved. To say that God first makes people live and then gives them faith is backward. First, people believe. Then they are given eternal life (Jn. 3:16, etc.). For a more detailed explanation of Calvinism, see "Calvinism" by G. Michael Cocoris under "Theological Studies" at disciplesbibleinstitute.com.

The practical problem with the notion of the perseverance of the saints is that it is used as a basis for assurance. Calvinists teach that people are to examine themselves to see if they are genuine Christians. They urge people to "Examine yourself as to whether you are in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5). If people find spiritual fruit in their lives through good works, they can conclude that they are saved. If they do not find fruit and works, that is proof they are not saved. The question is, "Does 2 Corinthians 13:5 tell believers to examine themselves to see if they are saved?

The passage says, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove your own selves. Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified" (2 Cor. 13:5-6). In this context, the Corinthians sought proof that Christ was speaking in Paul (2 Cor. 13:3). Now, he tells them to examine themselves. The exam is to see whether or not they are "in the faith." Is Paul questioning whether or not they are believers?

Plummer remarks that it is difficult to understand how he could tell them to test themselves whether they are in the faith after saying: "By faith, you stand" (2 Cor. 1:24). Indeed, throughout the book, Paul assumes the Corinthians are genuine believers. The book is addressed "to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are in all Achaia" (2 Cor. 1:1). He calls them "beloved" (2 Cor. 7:1) and "brethren" (2 Cor. 8:1). He refers to them as his spiritual children (2 Cor. 12:14). Beyond those specific references, the whole tenor of the book is that it is addressed to believers exhorting them to Christ-like living. It is highly unlikely, if not odd, that he would question their salvation at the end of the book.

The issue is, "What is the meaning of the phrase 'in the faith.' "Elsewhere, Paul uses the phrase "not of one being justified or regenerated, but of one operating within the confines of Christian conviction" (1 Cor. 16:13; Titus 1:13; Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free*, pp. 200-201).

Paul asks, "Do you not know yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you" (2 Cor. 13:5). The Greek text indicates that Paul expected an affirmative answer. The question is, "What is it Paul was sure they knew?" What does he mean by "Jesus Christ is in you?" In this context, that phrase means Christ was working in and even through them. They sought proof of Christ speaking in Paul (2 Cor. 13:3). Paul says to examine yourselves to see if Christ is speaking in you.

There is the possibility that they could examine themselves and be disqualified! Paul is not talking about going to hell because in the next verse, he says, "But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified" (2 Cor. 13:6). In speaking of his own disqualification, did Paul mean to imply that he could not be a genuine believer? That is not even remotely the issue in this passage. The issue is whether or not Christ was speaking in Paul (2 Cor. 13:3). It was possible that Christ was not speaking in Paul or them! In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul uses the word "disqualified" of his service, not his salvation.

In his book, *Once Saved, Always Saved,* Kendall, the former pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, says, "Paul is not turning on them at the last moment and raising the question of whether or not they were even saved (how often people quote 2 Corinthians 13:5 out of context)…. *As they were seeking a proof of Christ speaking through Paul (2 Corinthians 13:3), Paul turns on them and asks them to prove that Christ is speaking through them.* Thus, he says that Jesus Christ is speaking in them unless they have failed the test (2 Corinthians 5). The contrast is not that of being saved or lost, but whether or not, as saved people, Christ is openly manifest in them" (Kendall, p. 74, italics added).

Thus, Calvinism teaches that since God gives people faith, they *will* produce fruit, do good works, and persevere to the end, as if it's automatic, but that is precisely what the New Testament does not teach!

Believers are told they must abide in Christ to produce fruit. Jesus commands, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:4-5). The Greek word translated "abide" in this passage is the same Greek word that was translated "continue" in John 8:31. The way to abide is to depend on the Lord (see the idea of a branch depending on a vine and "without Me you can do nothing"). "Abiding is a metaphor for a relationship. It describes a relationship of submission and dependence on our part and a relationship of nurture and enablement on His part" (Derickson and Radmacher, p. 172). Abiding also requires obedience (15:10; 1 Jn. 3:24). Believers who lovingly obey the Word of God produce much fruit. Many have pointed out that there is a progression of fruit-bearing in this passage, moving from no fruit to some fruit, to more fruit (Jn. 15:2), and now much fruit (Jn. 15:5).

Jesus adds, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (Jn. 15:6). As in verse 2, the word "branch" in verse 6 is a believer. Since in verse 2, Jesus has said, "you," meaning the disciples, "are the branches" (15:5), the individual in verse 6 is a believer. Besides, the branch is cast out "as a branch." There is no question but that this branch is a believer. The problem is that this believer did not abide in Christ and was thrown into the fire.

The fire of this verse has sparked a bonfire of controversy. Some say the fire here looks forward to the Day of Judgment (Plummer). Is Jesus teaching that believers could end up in the fire of hell? The answer is "No." Jesus taught that believers were given everlasting life, meaning they had passed from death into life and would not "come into judgment" (Jn. 5:24).

The fire of hell is not the only fire in the Bible. Those who say this verse is about believers have different interpretations of the fire. Derickson and Radmacher point out that mature wood would have to be removed to build a fire from branches, which indicates that this refers to the severe pruning that began during the dormant season after all the fruit had been harvested. According to them, the fire in John 15:6 illustrates uselessness, not destruction (so also Haddon Robinson). In fact, vine wood is worthless as wood. Furniture cannot be made from it, nor anything else.

The fire in this verse could be the fire of trials (1 Pet. 1:7, 4:12). Wiersbe says that the fire "describes divine discipline rather than eternal destiny." The fire has been explained as the fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Dillow). The objection to the suggestion that the fire in John 15:6 is the Judgment Seat of Christ is that the *branch* is said to be cast in the fire and not just his works, but believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ are saved "through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15).

Not abiding has serious consequences. First, there is the loss of fellowship—he is cast out. Next, there is a loss of fervency or vitality—and is withered. Finally, there is a loss of reward—they are burned (or at least useless in this life, which results in a loss of reward). Failure to abide produces spiritual disaster. Jesus commands believers to abide to produce fruit. Not abiding means loss. It is either fruit or fire.

Producing fruit is not automatic. Believers must abide to produce fruit (Jn. 15:4-5).

Believers are told that they *should* do good works. "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" (Titus 3:8a italics added). The Greek word translated "affirm constantly" implies persistence and thoroughness (Alford). Many preach that works are automatic. If you are saved, they say, you will spontaneously, so to speak, go to work because of the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. That was not Paul's point of view. He taught that believers needed to be constantly and continuously told to work.

Furthermore, believers who are to perform these good works will have to put forth thought and effort. Verse 8 says believers should be "careful." The Greek word "careful" means "to take thought to" and denotes earnest and careful thought, yea, even a straining in that direction (Fairbairn). They should be concerned and careful to "maintain" good works. The Greek word rendered "maintain" means "to stand before, preside over, rule, govern," but here probably means "direct, maintain, practice." They were to have a thoughtful approach to maintaining good works (Guthrie). The point is that those who trust in God must be constantly told they should practice good works. They should give thought and effort to doing so. In short, plan and perform good works.

Good works are not automatic. Believers must be careful to maintain good works" (Titus 3:8a).

Believers are told that it is their responsibility to endure. "And not only *that,* but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance (Greek: "endurance") and perseverance (Greek: "endurance"), character; and character, hope" (Rom. 5:3-4). "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Tim. 2:3). "If we endure, We shall also reign with *Him*" (2 Tim. 2:12). "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). "But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness" (1 Tim. 6:11). Paul told Titus to tell the older men to be "sound in faith, in love, in patience" (Greek: "endurance") (Titus 2:2). "Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jas. 1:12). "Indeed we count them blessed who endure" (Jas. 5:11). "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have

done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Heb. 10:36). "Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us,* and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). "But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance (Greek: "endurance"), to perseverance godliness" (2 Pet. 1:5-6). In the parable of the Sower, those "with a noble and good heart, keep *it* [the word] and bear fruit with patience (Greek: "endurance")

But doesn't the Bible say, "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Mt. 10:22; 24:13; Mk. 13:13). This statement is often interpreted to mean those who persevere in their spiritual life will be saved spiritually, implying that those who do not persevere will not be saved. The problem with the explanation is that the subject of the passage is not spiritual salvation. The subject under discussion is service in the Tribulation. Therefore, endurance in this passage is enduring the persecution of the Tribulation and being saved is deliverance from it. According to McNeile, endurance in this passage is enduring the "intensity of the persecution," and "salvation is deliverance and victory in the coming kingdom." He says the best commentary on this verse is Revelation 2:10. Alexander says those who persist in the faith in extreme trials will be "rescued, finally delivered from them." They must endure arrest, scourging, and trials before religious and civic leaders, as well as rejection by their own families.

Endurance is not automatic. Believers are to give "all diligence" to add "perseverance" (Greek: "endurance") (1 Pet. 1:5-6).

So, according to the New Testament, if believers grow, produce fruit, perform good works, and endure to the end, they will be better off in this life and in the life to come. As Paul says, "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4:8). On the other hand, if believers do not grow, produce fruit, perform good works, and endure to the end, they will be disciplined in his life (1 Cor. 11:30) and will lose reward at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-15).

Therefore, every believer in Jesus Christ should pray the prayer of the psalmist, which says, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it *to* the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart" (Ps. 119:33-34). Ask the Lord to teach you and give you an understanding of His Word; by God's grace, keep it and observe it with your whole heart to the end.

Bibliography

Abbott-Smith, G. *A Manuel Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960 (reprint of the 1937 edition).

Alexander, Joseph Addison. *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. Reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.

_____. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Lynchburg, VA: James Family Christian Publishers, ND (originally published in 1861).

Alford, Henry. *The Greek New Testament*, *Vol. III,* with revision by Everett F. Harrison. Chicago: Moody Press, 1968.

Bruce, F. F. *Commentary on The Book of Acts*. New International Commentary on the New Testament series. Reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984.

Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries*. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/james/1.htm

Cocoris, G. Michael. *Calvinism*. disciplesbibleinstitute.com, under "Theological Studies."

Derickson, Gary W. and Earl D. Radmacher. *The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus*. Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle Publishing, Co., 2001.

Dillow, Joseph C. *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. Miami Springs, Fla.: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co. 1992.

Fairbairn, Patrick. *The Pastoral Epistles*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1874.

France, R. T. *Matthew, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985.

Godet, F. L., *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. 2 vol. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House. 1883.

Gill, John. *John Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible*. e-sword.net.

Guthrie, Donald. *The Pastoral Epistles* in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986.

Hodges, Zane C. *The Epistle of James*. Irving, Texas: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994.

_____. "Light on James Two from Textual Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 120, No. 480 (October-December, 1963) pp. 341-350.

_____. *Absolutely Free.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989.

Inglis, James. "Simon Magus," *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*. Spring 1989, vol. 2:1.

Kendall, R. T. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Lang, G. H. *Pictures and Parables*. Miami Springs: Conley & Schoettle Publishing Co., Inc, 1985.

Marshall, I. Howard. *The Acts of the Apostles*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series. Reprint ed. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, and Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984.

Mayor, Joseph. *The Epistle of St. James*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954.

MacDonald, William. *Believer's Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990.

McNeile, Alan Hugh. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. London: MacMillan & Co. LTD, 1961 (originally published in 1915).

Mitton, C. Leslie. *The Epistle of James*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter of James*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985.

NKJV Study Bible. Edited by Earl D. Radmacher. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997.

Robinson, Haddon. *The Christian Salt & Light Company: A Contemporary Study of the Sermon on the Mount*. Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1988.

Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Alive*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986.