

“Happiness is when what you *think*, what you *say* and what you *do* are in harmony”  
(Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi)

#### **V14 HOME TRUTHS**

1. V14 “brothers and sisters” term of endearment, used 15 times in this letter.
2. V14 “What good is it...?” Rhetorical Q1 (A: none!)
3. Central thrust Vv14, 17, 26 “faith but” / “faith by itself” / “faith without” – deficient faith
  - a. Cf Martin Luther who, in his 1522 *Septemberbibel* (translation of the NT), termed James an “epistle of straw” (as per 1Cor3:12) and relegated it to an appendix.
  - b. Q: But, um, what about the great Reformation catch-cry *sola fide*? (A: “*faith alone* doesn’t mean the same thing when applied to justification, sanctification, and final salvation.” See John Piper ‘Does God really save us by Faith Alone?’ at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org))
4. V14 “Can *such* faith save them?” (Rhetorical Q2 (A: nope!). And “such” shows that the type of faith spoken of here is somehow different – lesser, phony, fake, zombie.
5. Cognitive dissonance: “the mental conflict that occurs when a person’s behaviors and beliefs do not align...It may also happen when a person holds two beliefs that contradict one another.” (‘Cognitive Dissonance: What to Know’, Jayne Leonard, *Medical News Today*, Oct 2019)

#### **Vv 15-17 GRITTY EXAMPLE**

1. V15 “Brother or sister” – Radical community the early church was known for; *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World’s largest Religion*, Rodney Stark)
2. V15 “without clothes and daily food” – soooo practical (typical James).
  - a. Lit. ‘naked’ and without any food (needs v greeds).
  - b. Sim to 1Jn3:16-18 real love – here it’s real faith, “in actions and in truth.”
3. V16 “If one of you says [blah blah blah] what good is it?” Rhetorical Q3 (A: big fat nuthin!)
  - a. Beware empty platitudes, duplicitous sayings, and cop-outs.
  - b. “To the hungry person the Gospel is bread” (Archbishop Desmond Tutu)
  - c. Compassion + partnership + accountability = empowerment. (See ‘When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself’ by Corbett & Fikkert).
4. V17 “faith...if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”
  - a. Eph 2:8-9 (AND 10!)
    - i. The perfect tense verb is ‘have been saved’ (Gk *sesōsmenoi* – lit. ‘have been healed, delivered, rescued’) Our salvation assurance is surely assured!
    - ii. “Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is not alone” (John Calvin)
  - b. It’s like the opposite of some New Age beliefs – where we can think ourselves to awesomeness. Here we act ourselves to authenticity.
  - c. ANALOGY for inauthentic faith: Of what value is a fake \$100 bill?
    - i. Some would say \$100 – if you can fool people.
    - ii. Actually it’s worth *less* than nothing. It engenders mistrust, causes confusion, and ultimately will get revealed for being a fake – & at a cost to whoever was relying on it.
  - d. *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*. (Lit. “The law of what is prayed [is] what is believed [is] the law of what is lived” – that is, our worship reflects our beliefs & determines how we live)
  - e. Faith v works is a false dichotomy. “[F]or Paul and James would agree that the basis of salvation is grace alone through faith, with works not the *basis* but the necessary *result* thereof.” (*The Letter of James*, ESV, Osborne, 2394). Complimentary!
  - f. CONTEXT: James seems to be writing to correct the misapprehension that ‘faith’ could be mere intellectual assent; Paul (in eg Eph 2, Rom 4, Gal 5) was correcting those who placed their hope in the Law of Moses.
  - g. TOUGH Q: “consider being as generous with your poorer brothers and sisters as you are luxurious with yourself?” (*Vital Signs: the Wisdom of James for a Life of Faith*, John Dickson and Simon Smart, 121)

## Vv18-19 THEOLOGICAL REASONING

1. V18 “Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.” So says the imagined interlocutor. Cognitive dissonance.
  - a. Gal 5:6 not circumcision or uncircumcision, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love” (cf 5:1 “it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery”). If you’re trying to be justified by the law Christ will be of no value.
  - b. Rom 3:27-28. Differentiate James and Paul’s use of ‘faith’ here. “Paul speaks against those who try to be saved by deeds instead of true faith; James speaks against those who confuse mere intellectual assent with true faith.” (*James*, NLT Davids *et al*, 2118)
  - c. Paul is against “works of the law” (Rom 4:28, Gal 3:1-21), which delineate Jewish custom (favoritism), but to “walk by the Spirit” is being free *from* sin, not being free *to* sin (1Cor6:9-11, Gal 5:19-25)
2. V19 “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder”
  - a. *Shema* Deut 6:4 “the Lord is one” (insufficient without V5!)
  - b. Zaniness of anyone implying demons are saved! (Focus on ‘Lordship’ of Jesus in our lives)
  - c. Knowing about Jesus → knowing Jesus → following Jesus
  - d. It is not just knowing Jesus IS Lord, it’s FOLLOWING Jesus as Lord!

## Vv20-25 BIBLICAL REASONING

1. V20 “You foolish person” (Lit. ‘empty headed’ person devoid of understanding spiritual truth); and see chapter 1 sermons – be kind to idiots, direct with fools).
2. V22 “faith and...actions...working together...faith...made complete”
  - a. Overcomes taking V21 out of context.
  - b. Can’t earn our salvation by obeying God (Jas 2:10!)
  - c. But “loving service [is] not a substitute for, but rather a verification of, our faith in Christ” (*James*, NLT Davids *et al*, 2118)
3. Vv21-25 EXAMPLES (imperfect obedience meets real ‘faith’) – the father and the prostitute.
4. Abraham (Gen 22:9-11). Extreme act – and is indicative of a life of faithfulness (Cf Paul who also quotes Gen 15:6 in Rom 4:3 and Gal 3:6, but for an alternate purpose – pointing out that such faith transcends the ceremonial law.)
  - a. Vv21-22 “Abraham considered righteous for what he did...his faith was made complete” – faith brought to maturity by sacrificial obedience and withstanding extreme testing. (cf use of term “justified” in NASB, ESV)
  - b. V24 “a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.” Here ‘faith alone’ is distinguished from real faith (as per Rom 3:28; and see above Eph 2:8-10).
5. V25 Rahab (Josh 2, 6:25, Heb 11, Matt 1:5 – forebearer of Boaz!)
  - a. She *acted* in alignment with her statement of Lordship (Josh 2:9-13), and in Jewish tradition became a kind of spiritual matriarch of those who turned from paganism to *Yahweh*. A pagan prostitute had a better grasp of real faith than most Christians.

## V26 CONCLUSION

“Dead”. Body without the spirit = faith without deeds. James (& his half-brother, Jesus) would be horrified if we came out of this with just more Christian bloviating, that is, without renewing our vow to radical love!

## QUESTIONS FOR THE BRAVE OF HEART:

- Have you ever been burned by a ‘phony’ Christian? (Could you be so described?)
- If grace is so amazing, why bother with obedience? (Explain *that* to your non-Christian mates!) Ok, so where does that leave assurance of salvation?
- Are you (actually) comfy that your faith will, one day, be ‘verified’? Why or why not?
- Who are you going to ask to hold God’s blowtorch to you this week? How hot can you handle?

### This Week’s Memory Verse:

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” James 2:26