

Bondservant of Christ: Be a Doer of the Word – Part 2

Key Verses for Part 2:

“If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. For He who said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,’ also said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” James 2:8-13

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and 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? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” James 2:14-17

Teaching Outline for Part 2:

- A. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all (2:10)
 - 1. So, speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty (2:12)
 - a) For He who said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,’ also said, ‘DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.’ (2:11a)
 - b) Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (2:11b)
 - 2. If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture (2:8a)
 - a) ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF’ (2:8b)
 - b) You are doing well (2:8c)
 - 3. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors (2:9)
 - a) For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy (2:13a)
 - b) Mercy triumphs over judgment (2:13b)
- B. Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself (2:17)
 - 1. What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? (2:14a)
 - a) Can that faith save him? (2:14b)
 - 2. If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food (2:15)
 - a) And one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled (2:16a)
 - b) And yet do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? (2:16b)

Introduction

In part one of our study on the theme of being a doer of the Word rather than a deluded hearer, we studied through James 1:19-25 with a detailed look at what he meant in verse 22: *“But prove yourselves to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”* As we saw previously, throughout chapter one James introduced the themes he will expound on in the rest of the epistle, and 1:19-25 introduced the theme of being a doer of the word. I stated that the “word” James

referred to is the Sermon on the Mount and that his epistle can be viewed as a commentary on the sermon by offering practical application of Jesus' instruction. We saw that to prove ourselves doers involves deliberately investigating the word as it is received instead of simply hearing the word and choosing not to reflect upon what was received. This deliberate investigation will produce results. We saw that being an investigative doer of the word also involves being a doer of the "work", which is summarized through the Beatitudes and then expounded on in the remainder of Jesus' sermon. The good works that are produced through the life of a doer of the word will glorify God, and the works are an extension of a doer being a follower of Christ. James stated clearly in 2:17 that works are necessary for faith to be authentic, *"Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."* But before we get there, we are going to look at 2:8-13 which serves as a transitional paragraph from his thoughts on poverty and wealth, to his thoughts on the necessity of works. His intended audience seemed to be overlooking the fact that all are guilty of breaking the law and deserve judgment. They were showing favoritism toward the wealthy and exercising their own form of judgment on the poor, not as impartial judges but as ones with evil intent. They were merciless toward the poor in their treatment of them. As James made his transition into the need for works in the life of the believer, he will use their judgmentalism to emphasize their need to demonstrate the work of mercy that we also see in the Beatitude of Matthew 5:7, *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."* This will lead James into his thoughts on the need for works to be evident in the life of the believer in Christ.

All are guilty of breaking the law and deserve judgment

The one-liner that summarizes 2:8-13 is verse 10, *"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all."* James pointed to the merciless treatment his audience had been giving to the poor among them, their showing of favoritism to the wealthy, creating distinctions that divide people, and behaving like judges. But their judgments were faulty, improper and did not reflect the instruction of Jesus regarding the poor in the Sermon on the Mount. What they needed to demonstrate was mercy because those who judge without mercy will be judged in like fashion (2:13a). And if they thought they would be excused from judgment due to good behavior or some other inherent characteristic, James clearly put a halt to that incorrect estimation. He pointed out that all are transgressors of the law and at risk of being judged as such, because if anyone had stumbled over just one point of the law, then he *"has become guilty of all."* The point was that no one had kept the law perfectly and would therefore be judged. And since they had been merciless in their judgment of the poor among them, they would also be judged without mercy. The judgmental behavior being demonstrated by his audience was the transition that James used to launch into his broadside that faith without evidential works is dead. It is also a rebuke to anyone who believed that they could be merciless and still possess genuine faith, that faith without works could be alive and well. We will study this transitional paragraph in more detail.

In 1:25 James made a distinction between a doer and a hearer by describing the doer as one who *"looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty."* You may recall that the verb "to look intently" was also used in John 20: 5 and 11 when Peter and Mary investigated the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid to rest. The verb communicates more than simply peering inside but describes someone who is investigating a matter that was unusual, as if their attention had been averted by an occurrence that was not expected. James characterized the doer of the Word as someone whose full attention had been drawn to "the word implanted" (1:21) and their focus averted from what they were doing and given fully to this new development. This new matter that required their full attention is "the law of liberty." James repeated the phrase "law of liberty" in 2:12 and his audience is reminded again to give it their full attention. This time they are to speak and behave in such a way as those who will be judged by the "law of liberty." This is an interesting way to put this, that someone can be judged by

a law of liberty. Liberty implies freedom, so what is the basis of judgment? How can someone be judged by freedom? James' teaching on this matter reflected how Jesus made an important transition from the Mosaic law to this new "law of liberty."

The Law of Liberty

Liberty implies a state of being free from restrictions. Recall that the New Testament uses of the word "freedom" describe how believers in Christ are now living under freedom from the Mosaic Law due to their faith in Christ. Believers have a relationship with God and a new rule of conduct, a conduct based on the liberty provided through the mercy of God in Christ. Mercy is when someone is not given what they deserve. James alerted those who judged the poor that they deserve judgment themselves. That judgment is withheld for the believer solely through the mercy of God. Believers may no longer follow the rules of the Mosaic Law, but they do live in liberty, or freedom, provided by the mercy of God. If one fully investigates this freedom in Christ, they will begin to make the connection that their conduct should reflect the freedom they possess in Christ, because they are not receiving what they deserve – judgment. James encouraged his audience to live in a manner reflective of this freedom and, specifically, to stop being unmerciful to the poor. Do not judge others unmercifully when God in Christ has extended mercy to you. Instead, be one who reflects the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:8 by being merciful as one who will receive mercy.

To prompt his audience to give consideration to the law of liberty, James made reference to how Jesus explained the transition from the Mosaic Law to the law of freedom. *"For He who said, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,' also said, 'DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."* (2:11) Here is an example of James taking teachings from the Sermon on the Mount and applying them to current situations he addressed in his epistle. It is interesting to note that James switched the violations compared to Jesus. Jesus addressed personal relationships in Matthew 5:21-48 and began this teaching by talking about murder followed by adultery. Jesus taught it this way:

First, *"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court."* (Matthew 5:21-22)

Second, *"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28)

First, James made a statement about adultery and, second, about murder. I believe he made that switch due to his audience. He had just addressed how they treated the poor, by making themselves judges who lack mercy. Many among his audience probably considered themselves to be upright and good people because they had not committed offenses such as adultery. But by reminding his readers of what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, he also prompted them to recall that one could commit adultery just by lusting after a woman. If they had lusted for a woman who was not their wife or was the wife of another man, then they were just as culpable as one who had committed adultery. Then he hit them with another transgression – anger. James pointed out to his readers that they may not have committed adultery, and perhaps had not even lusted for a woman, but many had been guilty of anger in the way they had treated the poor. Jesus made the connection of murder and anger in Matthew 5:27-28 and now James made that connection. *"Now if you do not commit adultery [lust], but do commit murder [anger], you have become a transgressor of the law."* (2:11b) Based on their mistreatment of the poor, his audience has obviously been angry with their presence and sought to remove them. In this, they had intentionally acted based on anger, and like murder, this was a

transgression of the law deserving judgment. However, James did not follow this up with a condemnation that they would all be judged under the law but went in another direction. “*So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.*” James did this because his intent was not to confront them as sinners in need of repentance, but as believers who needed to consider whether their faith was genuine or not. Remember that he is transitioning to a faith proven by the evidence of works, and he did this by using their own behavior. Their treatment of the poor was wrong, and they needed to stop. They did not need to stop because it was a nice thing to do. They needed to stop because demonstrating mercy was what one with genuine faith did. Believers conduct themselves with mercy just as they had been shown mercy by God.

Mercy as a good work

At this point, recall what we learned in part one of this study on being a doer of the word. In James 1:22 he pointed to the added necessity of being a doer of the “work.” We saw in the Sermon on the Mount, just after the listing of the Beatitudes, Jesus stated, “*Let your light shine in such a way that they will see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16) The “good works” Jesus was referring to are the Beatitudes, poverty, mourning, gentleness, mercifulness, peacemaking, being persecuted for the sake of righteousness, and being insulted and rejected. Being merciful is a good work, not a work in the sense of a good deed performed by a good person, but is an evidential work based on who you are in Christ. James explained to his audience that they needed to stop mistreating the poor and being unmerciful because this is not compatible to one who has been extended mercy by God through Christ. In other words, stop behaving in a manner not compatible with who you are in Christ and demonstrate the good works referred to by Jesus, starting with mercy toward the poor. Just in case his audience was still not convinced, James took it a step further. This added step will also help us understand how one can be judged by liberty.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus included anger with the offense of murder and lust with the offense of adultery to teach that his followers lived, not under the Mosaic Law, but under a new code of conduct because of the freedom they possessed in Him. James used his own analogy to reinforce the same principle to his readers and applied it to their own behavior. He stated, “*If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,’ you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*” (1:8-9) His readers may well have thought upon reading his epistle, “I have not lusted or committed adultery. And my treatment of the poor did not include murder or anger at them, so I am innocent of the charge. I just didn’t want the poor hanging around, so I removed them.” There may also have been evidence of licentiousness or taking advantage of the freedom now available in Christ. To this point James referred to Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:43-44, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy,’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*” The full phrase quoted by James was made by Jesus in Matthew 22:39, “*The second is like it, YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.*”

James referred to this as “the royal law” by using the adjective βασιλικον which can be translated “royal, kingly, related to a king.” The Mounce Online Greek Dictionary states that it can also mean “of the highest excellence” and could have that translation in James 2:8. James wanted his readers to understand that this phrase is to be considered with high importance, as one being connected to Christ, and if one is fulfilling this kingly law, they “*are doing well.*” Many of his readers no doubt believed they were in good standing regarding Jesus’ command to love their neighbors. Then James added a zinger. “*But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*” He already accused them of showing partiality in the way they treated the poor

among them. (2:1,4) Therefore they are in violation of a direct command from Jesus that is of highest importance. How can one “love their neighbor” when they are passing judgment on them and treating them with evil intent? They are violating this “royal law” with their partiality. Again, their behavior suggests that they are not being doers of the word or considering seriously the law of liberty. James simply would not let them off the hook. He repeatedly emphasized that all were guilty of breaking the law and all deserved judgment, no matter how one may view themselves. The only reason they would not be judged as they deserved was due to the mercy of God. They were not getting what they deserved and that should motivate them to demonstrate mercy toward others. This is the point of transition to works as evidence of faith and it is important that we see how James makes the shift.

First, we need to remember that James is addressing Jewish Christians. His intended audience are believers in Christ. Therefore, because of their faith in Christ, they will not be judged by the Mosaic Law. They will not be judged for breaking that law, for their sin. His audience had mistreated the poor and not behaved as those who had received mercy, that is true. But, as believers, they are secure in Christ as far as not having to face the wrath of God in judgment. So, why does James make the following statement? *“For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”* (2:13) It is because James wanted his readers to wake up to the fact that believers in Christ have works as evidence of genuine faith. If they are incapable of demonstrating mercy as they have been shown mercy by God, then their faith may not be genuine at all. If any of his readers were under the impression that because they were “in Christ” they could speak and behave in whatever way they felt, they were incorrect in their thinking.

In 2:13 the word translated “shown” is a participle derived from the verb ποιέω which means “to do, to make, to practice, to produce.” The Mounce Online Greek Dictionary adds “a generic term of action or performance” to the meaning. This goes beyond something simply being visible. There is action with this word in the sense of bringing something about through effort. That is why I keep referring to this as a demonstration of mercy. There needs to be a process revealing the existence or proof of mercy on the part of the believer. And it goes further than simply being a good deed of mercy. Anyone can do that. This is a “good work” referred to by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount that extends from who one is as a true believer and follower of Jesus Christ. Being merciful should be an extension of a believer just as being poor in spirit, being meek, or hungering and thirsting for righteousness are a part. Being merciful is an extension in the same way that being insulted or persecuted is. Believers do not perform deeds of insulting themselves or self-persecution. Those characteristics are basically a result of who they are in Christ. Therefore, if one is literally merciless, then the question needs to be asked, “Is there any true belief or faith within?”

This brings us back to the statement, *“So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.”* (2:12) The word translated “to be judged” in this verse is a form of the verb κρίνω which means “to separate, to distinguish.” It implies the ability to see or recognize differences. Mounce adds “preferring one thing over another or determining correctness of a matter” to the meaning. Obviously, a judge must possess the ability to express an opinion on the matter of right and wrong. But it is the ability to make a separation or distinction that is interesting in the application of this verse. James instructed his readers to speak and act in a manner that would separate them or distinguish them according to the law of liberty. He asked them to look intently, to give serious consideration to this law of liberty to determine whether their behavior toward the poor is appropriate. They are separating and distinguishing the poor with evil intentions. They may have looked at their actions as giving the poor what they deserved. James directed them to correct their behavior toward being in line with the mercy that had been extended to them through the law of liberty.

Then James added “mercy triumphs over judgment” in 2:13. The word translated “triumphs” is a form of the verb κατακαυχάομαι meaning “to boast about, to emphatically declare, to triumph over.” This form is only used three times in the New Testament, two of them by James, and contains a sense of being arrogant within the meaning. With this insight on the meaning of the Greek word, the statement that mercy triumphs over judgment makes more sense. What James was telling his readers is that, as believers in Christ who have been shown mercy, they should be boasting about, emphatically declaring, the superiority of mercy over judgment. Mercy is the atmosphere that a believer lives in. Mercy is life for the follower of Christ. It is that important for without it there would only be judgment, and something that essential is worth boasting about. It is why James told his readers to stop judging the poor. Those in Christ no longer lived in that way, under judgment, but under the law of liberty, as those who had been shown mercy. With this understanding, we see more clearly that being merciful is not simply a good deed but is a demonstration of who one is in Christ. James will now transition to what I consider the underlying and central theme to the entire epistle, but first, let’s take a moment to consider mercy.

Application of mercy to the life of the believer

What does it mean to be merciful? Jesus stated, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*” (Matthew 5:7) Mercy is not really an action word in the sense of performing a deed to help someone. Mercy is defined as not giving someone what they deserve. Grace, on the other hand, is to give someone what they do not deserve. Mercy is more about withholding, whereas grace is more about giving. However, there is implied acceptance on the part of the one receiving mercy. When offered, mercy must be accepted. Mercy and grace go hand in hand. We can see this point in Hebrews 4:16, “*Therefore let us draw near to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*” In prayer, we go to God so that we may receive mercy and find grace. Let’s take a closer look at this verse.

The word translated “receive” is a form of the verb λαμβάνω which means “to take, to receive” describing the action of a receiver taking possession of what is offered. Doing a word study on this verb reveals that the receiver does not necessarily have because they take, but that they have because mercy is offered. In other words, without the provider of mercy, there is nothing to take. Without the giver of the gift there is nothing to be received. Also, it helps to consider that the offer of mercy by the giver becomes a gift of grace to the receiver. The one praying finds grace. In Hebrews 4:16 the word translated “find” is a form of the verb εὕρισκω which means “to find, to discover.” Obviously, for anything to be found, whether it be an object, a concept, or a good deed, it must be in a place so that it can be found. The interesting thing about mercy is that it is not deserved by the finder. So, when viewed from the perspective of the receiver, it is grace, to be given what is not deserved.

A clear way to think of all this on a human-to-human level is in terms of someone owing you money and they are unable to pay you back. They do not possess the means to obtain the money needed. Due to their inability to pay, you cannot balance your accounting books. Then someone, whether it be you are another party, pays in full the debt owed. This payment is made without any contribution or action on the part of the debtor. The debt is erased, and your accounts are balanced. Here is where it becomes pertinent to our study.

You go to the one in debt and tell them their debt has been paid, your books are balanced, and as far as you are concerned your dealings are complete. From your perspective, this is an act of mercy. You are providing the circumstances needed for the debtor to be cleared of culpability. As the holder of the debt, if you did not provide this it would not be available to the debtor. You have every right to demand payment because they owe you, but you are not holding them accountable. The debtor is

not getting what they deserve, i.e., being held responsible for repayment. You are offering mercy. At this point there is no action for the debtor to take. You are not really making an offer for them to take because the transaction has already been made. You are not offering a deal because the dealing is done. The act of acceptance on the part of the debtor is more of a recognition that the cancellation of debt is valid. But there is no action in terms of a deed performed that the debtor could do. It is essential that we understand mercy in this way, that it is dependent upon the provider. However, from the perspective of the debtor, this is grace because they are being given something they do not deserve. Their debt is cleared, and they do not have to pay. As an offer of grace, it can be accepted. Whereas mercy cannot be acted upon other than to say, "thank you," a gift of grace can be taken by the receiver. This is the point at which mercy and grace go hand in hand. Mercy is extended from the provider and in the process of being extended it becomes grace for the receiver. It begins with mercy and without mercy there is no grace. This is also the point where the "law of liberty" begins.

Recall from part one of this study that the law of liberty is describing the essential quality of being free, as the governing law of freedom. For the debtor who has just been provided with freedom from repayment, they now live free from debt. As the provider of this new freedom for the debtor you can justifiably say to the debtor, *"So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty."* In other words, live in such a way that you understand, comprehend and appreciate this freedom that you now live in. The debtor has no debt to be paid and should therefore live in a manner that will distinguish them as one who lives in freedom from debt. Recall that "to be judged" in this verse means "to be separated, to prefer one thing over another." The former debtor should live in a manner that would differentiate them as one who lives in lawful freedom.

When you take this into consideration, James' instruction begins to all fit together. In part one we studied these verses: *"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."* (James 1:23-25) Consider the connections:

"For if anyone is a hearer of the word" – the word is the Sermon on the Mount. In the sermon Jesus taught that we are to be merciful. A hearer who is not a doer *"is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror... and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."* The hearer gives no further thought to who they were before they believed in Christ, before they received the mercy of God, a sinner condemned to judgment. This person walks away giving no consideration as to how to be merciful to anyone and goes about their week forgetting what they heard. *"But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it"* is one who hears, considers, and understands how mercy changed their standing before God and decides to live in a way that reflects that change. They become *"an effectual doer."* They received the mercy offered to them and now they will extend mercy to another. This person may well decide in their heart that they will live like this... "I will not commit murder by being angry but will forgive;" "I will not commit adultery through lust so I will remain pure in heart (another of the Beatitudes);" "I will not break the royal law of loving my neighbor by being partial so I will help out and give where I am able." This is abiding by the "law of liberty." The law typically tells you what you will not do, such as do not steal, do not covet, do not commit adultery. However, the law of liberty tells you what you can do, such as reflecting Christ by being merciful, forgiving, loving. And if you are one who is a hearer only, who walks away forgetting what was heard and doing nothing, you have broken the law of liberty by not reflecting all that has been done for you in Christ. James completed the paragraph with *"this man will be blessed in what he does."* Exactly what Jesus said! *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."* James

simply took the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and applied it to the circumstances his readers were living within, challenging them to live as Jesus taught and lived. We would do well to do the same today. Choose to be merciful just as we who are in Christ have been shown mercy.

Faith without works is dead

We now come to the heart of James' epistle. This is the hub from which all else that he addresses stems from. Basically, faith without works is dead. It is useless. James led up to this by addressing how the poor were being mistreated and transitioned into a discussion on mercy. Demonstrating mercy is an evidential work of genuine faith on the part of the provider of mercy. We shall now look a bit more in depth at this balance between faith and works.

"What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and 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? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." (James 2:14-17)

James began this paragraph with a question, *"What use is it... if someone says he has faith, but he has no works?"* The Greek word translated "says" is the verb λέγω which means "to say, to speak, to claim." The Mounce Online Greek Dictionary adds that it is "the most general term for speaking in the New Testament." The verb is in the subjunctive mood here which indicates probability or possibility. It is not in the indicative mood which would indicate the presence of something that is factual. Then James used a form of the verb ἔχω meaning "to have, to hold." James used this verb 10 times in his epistle and talks quite a bit in terms of those who have and who have not. One either has endurance to they do not. One either has humility or they do not. One either has genuine faith or they do not. There is no grey area in his epistle. James used the dichotomy again in verse 14, "has faith... has no works." As James used it, the verb communicated more than simple possession, but pointed to a state of accompaniment, such as we see in Hebrews 6:9. In other words, one cannot simply "say" they have faith, but faith needs to be accompanied by works. Another interesting point is in how he constructed the question. He asked, "what use is it for someone to make a general claim to have faith when there are no works to accompany it?" James used the Greek noun ἔργον meaning "work, activity, job." Mounce adds that it can be viewed as a work that is "a product of an action or process." We need to consider James' use of the noun ἔργον due to the claim of a works-based salvation.

I believe that much of the controversy surrounding what James stated regarding works extends from a misapplication of the noun ἔργον. James stated that faith without accompanying works is dead. His epistle was addressed to believers, persons who had accepted Christ as Messiah. He was not addressing persons outside of Christ who were unbelievers. His admonition regarding works had a context, that being faith. He was not telling someone that to be a believer there needed to be works that would allow them to earn faith. Rather, he was telling believers that if their belief is genuine then there would be works that accompanied faith. If you are hired for a job, your employer will expect that you will in turn produce work in keeping with that job. This is a clear and comprehensible concept. If you simply say you have a specific job but have no work production to show for it, what use is that? If you are a salesperson, there will be closed sales. If you are a construction worker, there will be projects underway or completed. If you are a lawyer, there will be cases. If you are a teacher, there will be lessons and students. This concept of being productive at work is not difficult to understand. And if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, one who believes that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, then there will be works that reveal the truth of your faith.

Here are Scripture references that appear outside the book of James using the noun ἔργον regarding this concept of works and deeds resulting from faith:

1 Corinthians 6:10 – “Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord’s work, so I also am.”

2 Corinthians 9:8 – “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”

Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

Colossians 1:10 – “so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”

1 Thessalonians 1:3 – “constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father”

2 Timothy 3:17 – “so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

1 Peter 2:12 – “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

1 John 3:18 – “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

MORE TO COME