

THE SOTERIOLOGY OF JAMES 2:14

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In the contemporary debate concerning salvific essentials, James 2:14 has served as a focal point for discussion. In the following study, the endeavor is made to allow the context of James to provide the key indicators on how saving faith should here be understood. The eternal ramifications of James 2:14 are most evident when the intent of James is discussed as it relates to the audience he has in mind. James is not merely concerned with some type of temporal blessing in 2:14. Instead, he is burdened over the very eternal existence of some people who are in his pastoral care.

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In times past, the book of James has become the subject of significant debate (such as in the time of Martin Luther), but by and large, it has been passed 'over in favor of "more theological" or "more important" books with respect to the Christian faith. This is an unfortunate thing to say of any book, and especially of one so close to the pulse of the early church. There has, however, been an awakening of sorts lately as to the vitality of the book of James. Unfortunately, this awakening is largely due to a theological debate in contemporary evangelical circles that centers in part around the interpretation of one particular passage in James, namely James 2:14. This debate is often called, among other things, the "Lordship salvation" controversy. It relates directly to the understanding of the relationship between salvation and sanctification. Within this debate, there are often appeals made to a given understanding of how James views the relationship, or defines the substance, of salvation and sanctification. Underlying many of these appeals are varying assumptions as to the interpretation of certain passages.

Amidst the many references made to the book of James in the debate, specific exegetical explanation is seldom given for the understanding espoused. Instead, the reader is presumed upon to accept the assumptions that underlie the interpretation being set forth. In light of this, the question must be raised whether the assumptions being made in relation to James 2:14 are in fact valid. It is the intention of this

paper to expose such assumptions and critique them in an endeavor to come to a clearer understanding of just what is the author's intended meaning in this text.

I. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

The specific issue to be addressed here centers around the intended meaning of the verb **σωζω**--"to save"--in 2:14. The first half of this study will endeavor to develop a clear understanding of James 2:14. We will first discuss the various options of meaning for the verb **σωζω** by itself, and next discuss the context that surrounds 2:14. Following this, we shall undertake to relate the meaning of the word within the surrounding context. Much of this process has clearly been done for us and is available in various commentaries and journal articles.¹ However, the theological dynamic in James' use of **σωζω** is regularly given little more attention than a brief definition, if mentioned at all, in most contemporary studies.² The intention of this section in the study is to build upon and draw together what has been written, and at the same time develop a logically coherent understanding of 2:14 that agrees exegetically with the thought of James in the

¹ There is a long-standing tradition, which this study delineates in further detail in the paragraphs below, concerning the interpretation of this passage as is best represented by the following authors: James B. Adamson, *James: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles: James* (trans. and ed. John Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), Peter H. Davids, *Commentary on James* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), John P. Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: James-Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), R. C. H. Lenski, *Interpretation of Hebrews and James* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1946), Thomas Manton, *An Exposition of the Epistle of James* (Evansville: Sovereign Grace, 1962), Ralph P. Martin, *James* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1988), James B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), Douglas J. Moo, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Letter of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), and James H. Ropes, *Epistle of St. James* (ICC; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916).

There are also various journal articles worth mentioning that have developed the salvation theme of James 2: 14 in some fashion. They are best represented by the following authors: Christoph Burchard, "Zu Jakobus 2:14-26," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 71/1/2 (1980) 27-45, William Dyrness, "Mercy triumphs over justice: James 2:13 and the theology of faith and works," *Themelios* 6/3 (April, 1981) 11-16, Simon J. Kistemaker, "The Theological Message of James," *JETS* 29/1 (March, 1986) 55-61, John F. MacArthur, Jr., "Faith According to the Apostle James," *JETS* 33/1 (March, 1990) 13-34, John Polhill, "Prejudice, Partiality, and Faith: James 2," *RevExp* 83/3 (Summer, 1986) 395-404, Robert V. Rakestraw, "James 2:14-26: Does James contradict Pauline Soteriology?" *Criswell Theological Review* 1/1 (Fall, 1986) 31-50, and Michael J. Townsend, "Christ, Community, and Salvation in the Epistle of James," *EvQ* 53/2 (April-June, 1981) 115-23.

² While not true of every study, many relied on generally accepted definitions and rarely made any attempt to support the definitions in detail. There were a number of references given in support, but unfortunately, the studies often simply referred to each other.

context of the book. This seems to be an especially urgent task in light of the recent debate concerning the understanding of this passage.³ The latter half of the study will deal directly with those who are opposed to the traditional interpretation of James 2:14, which understands James to be speaking of eternal salvation, by answering some of the objections they have made to this author's understanding of the text. Such a response has not been given any legitimate consideration in previous studies dealing with the theological development of James 2:14. In the past, the articles attempting to deal with this issue have given, at best, brief mention of the variant view, which understands James to be speaking of a very temporal salvation. That is, there seems to have been little effort given to deal with the variant interpretation in full.⁴ This author's study is intended to fill the ever widening gap. The discussion set forth in this latter section will provide the reader with the much needed construction of a response to the variant view causing such great contention regarding the book of James.

Some of the questions that ultimately need to be answered in such a study are these: What is the meaning of **SWZW**? From what is the person in question to be saved? How are works related to this salvation? How is faith related to this salvation? What type of faith is in view? All these and more will be answered or given reasonable consideration in the following discussion, while focusing attention primarily on the meaning of **SWZW** within its context in James 2:14.

³ It may be worthwhile to note that there is relatively small representation of those who have objected in written form to the view of James as it is understood in this study. The only major interpretive statements available are sections in Zane Hodges' *The Gospel Under Siege* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1981) and *Absolutely Free* (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1989), and the brief booklet 'Dead Faith' What is It? A Study on James 2:14-26 (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1987) by the same author. Earl D. Radmacher seems to be advocating the same position in his brief article "First Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James' by John F. MacArthur, Jr.," *JETS* 33/1 (March, 1990) 35-41. There is also a brief outline of a view similar to Hodges' in R. T. Kendall's *Once Saved, Always Saved* (Chicago: Moody, 1985) 207-17. However, there are many who would agree with the objections at a, more popular level. For these reasons it is crucial that we answer all the objections arising to the view of this study, but it is nonetheless unfortunate that they are not represented by more substantial documentation.

⁴ Most major works on James have not attempted a response. This is somewhat understandable since the few articles that do attend to the issue are mainly book reviews which mention the view only in passing. The most complete of these is William G. Bjork, "A Critique of Zane Hodges' *The Gospel Under Siege*, A review Article," *JETS* 30/4 (December, 1987), 457-60. Others that also mention the issue are Johnny V. Miller, "Book Reviews," *Trinity Journal* 4 NS/1 (Spring, 1983) 94, and R. F. White, "Book Reviews," *WTJ* 46/2 (Fall, 1984) 428. The one possible exception is the response of MacArthur, who does give a brief rebuttal of Hodges (MacArthur, "Faith" 28-32). However, he does not deal with Hodges' viewpoint in the depth that is necessary for a definitive response.

II. ASSUMPTIONS

In a study of this nature and scope, there are necessarily some assumptions that will be made. Let us briefly describe these assumptions before we address the task at hand. James was written by the half-brother of Jesus who was also an authoritative leader in the Jerusalem church. It was most likely written before the Jerusalem council, probably around 45-47 A.D. This is best supported by the lack of references to the council and the early death of the author. It is also assumed that the letter is written to Christian Jews that are scattered abroad. This is argued by the use of the word "brother" when addressing the audience and by the reference to the "twelve tribes of the diaspora." With these assumptions in mind, we shall begin our study.

III. LEXICAL ANALYSIS

The first portion of our discussion will entail outlining the possible options of meaning that the verb **σωζω** may take in any given context. The various lexica representing the relevant periods of history surrounding the time in which the letter of James was written provide us with a veritable gamut of possibilities for meaning. We shall begin with an analysis of them and their respective definitions, then mention briefly other possible influences.

The Classical period gives some insight into the original Greek usage of the word **σωζω** as authors such as Plato, Homer, Plutarch, and others used it in varying contexts. The range of meaning derived from a study of this period depicts references centered mainly around physical deliverance from a present reality with occasional reference to an eternal salvation.⁵

The New Testament period is of course the most relevant to our study at hand. The meanings represented by authors of this time, prevalently the New Testament authors themselves, seem to divide amongst three emphases. The first being mainly an eternal or eschatological salvation, the second referring to a preservation from physical

⁵ The Classical period, as represented by Liddell and Scott, presents four options that the verb **σωζω** may mean in a given context (H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *The Greek-English Lexicon* [New York: Harper, 1882] 1748). The first definition relates to persons being saved from death, kept alive, and escaping destruction. The second definition relates to things being kept safe or preserved. The third relates to keeping, observing, or maintaining something, such as a law. The fourth deals with keeping something in mind or remembering. All these definitions appear to have present realities in mind and do not refer specifically to an eternal perspective of salvation. This is not to say that such a connotation could not be inferred from the use of this verb, but it appears not to be a common usage in Classical literature. Cf. also Colin Brown, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 205-6, and Werner Foerster, *TDNT: Volume VII* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1971) 965-69.

harm or destruction, and the third referring to a combination of the two.⁶

The Patristics seemed to be narrowed to only two options. They are the eternal and the physical used exclusive of each other.⁷

It may be helpful to this study to understand the Septuagintal (LXX) usage of **swzw** as it represents various Hebrew texts. In the LXX, **swzw** was used to translate many verbs, but two in particular seem to stand out as most relevant. They are **ישע**, and **מלט**.⁸ Each verb takes physical deliverance as its main referent, but can have a spiritual sense included over and above physical deliverance. There are no usages of these verbs referring exclusively to a spiritual state of salvation, but they can at times express this as their main emphasis. Such an emphasis is often found in prophetic passages.⁹

This can help us in establishing the etymological development of **swzw** down through the time of the LXX and into the New Testament usage where the LXX was still referenced extensively. There had been adequate representation of the spiritual and eternal deliverance prior to the New Testament, but much of the emphasis was on present physical preservation as stated above. This understanding of LXX usage does not dictate the meaning in James, but it does provide us with a context of the development of the term during the writing of the New Testament, especially an early book-like James.

⁶ The New Testament period is best represented by W. Bauer, trans. by W. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) 798-99. This particular lexicon gives us three distinct definitional possibilities for **swzw**. These are the preservation from natural dangers, the preservation from eternal death, and a combination of both categories. Preservation from natural dangers includes being saved from death, brought out safely, freed from disease, preserved in good condition, and a form of greeting that wishes prosperity to the recipient. Preservation from eternal death was used in both the active and passive voice. It was used in the active to denote the saving activity of persons, especially God or Christ, and of qualities that lead to salvation. The use of **aro~co** in the passive voice denoted being saved or the attainment of salvation. The combination of these two areas had both the eternal and present perspective in mind. Much evidence is given for the emphasis of the eternal nature of salvation, particularly in James' use of the verb, by Colin Brown and J. Schneider, *New International Dictionary* 211-16, and Werner Foerster, *TDNT* 989-98.

⁷ The Patristic period, as represented by Lampe, seems to have been characterized by only two definitional variants for **swzw** (G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1961] 1361-62). The first is a general reference of being saved from sickness or physical constraints. The second definition addressed the salvation that is given by God, the objects of God's salvation, and the means of salvation. For a brief lexical description of each, see Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew-English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979) 446-47 (**ישע**), and 572 (**מלט**).

⁹ For a full development of the meanings found in the LXX, see Brown, *New International Dictionary*, 206-11, and Georg Fohrer, *TDNT* 970-80.

We have viewed the various options in meaning for **SWZW** and it seems possible to narrow them down to just three fairly general usages, namely, 1) with reference to salvation from some type of natural danger, 2) eternal salvation or some facet thereof, and 3) a combination of these two. Certainly all the usages would have been known by James' readers. We must remember that this is not a grocery list from which to choose; it only helps us to better understand our options. The emphasis in determining meaning must be upon the usage of the word in its context. With this in mind, we must now turn our attention to the context in which 2:14 is set.

IV. CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Verse 14 of chapter 2 may be translated as follows: "What is the use, my brothers, if a certain one should say he has faith, but does not have works? Is that faith able to save him?" (the expected answer being no).¹⁰ Our task is to relate what meaning the word save, (**SWZW**) might take on in such a context. Is this salvation from some present hazard or misfortune, or is it salvation from eternal damnation, or is it possibly a combination of the two? The pattern that will be followed in this section is to look first at the centerpoint of the passage and expand to every point of reference that encircles the passage. The study begins with an examination of 2:14 itself, then gradually moves outward into the surrounding context of the book of James, and culminates with a brief section related to the historical setting encompassing the situation of James and the early church.

James 2: 14

What is James saying when he pens 2:14? Obviously, he does not see much use to faith that does not have accompanying works. But what exactly does this faith entail? Does James see this faith being so weak as to result in forfeiting one's salvation and losing the confidence of eternal life with Christ? If we look at the form of argumentation that James is using, loss of salvation does not seem to be the point that he is making. What then is the point? As we examine James 2:14 more closely, he seems to speak of this faith unto salvation as something which one enters into initially. The emphasis he seems to make is an appeal for the reader to begin to exercise faith that will be able to save, not to continue to maintain a faith that could possibly be lost. Let us observe how this is expressed in the verse.

¹⁰ The grammatical construction of this question includes the negative particle **mh**, thereby expressing James' expectance of a negative answer to the question. Cf. H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1955) 265-66.

James begins his argument by asking a pragmatic question, "What is the use. . ." or "What is the advantage. . ." We must first determine for whom the advantage is intended. Interestingly, there seems to be both a primary and a secondary advantage evidenced in the passage. The secondary advantage appears to be the benefit of others. This is especially true if we look at the next two verses where the same phrase is used to describe the profit that comes to the brother or sister who is sent away without clothing and in need of food. This is a very immediate reflection of the benefits of faith, or the lack thereof. But also evident is the primary advantage that is to be gained by the "one saying he has faith." This seems to agree best with the statement that directly follows the qualification of "no works," "Is that faith able to save him?"¹¹ Ultimately, the primary usefulness that is in view is the advantage to the man who says he has faith. The advantage that James points out as the most prevalent is this man's salvation. The primary grounds of benefit to be found in this faith must be in whether or not it can preserve him in a future judgment.¹²

James now focuses his attention on the man in question. It is important to remember that James is using a form of argumentation that does not directly point toward the people to whom he wants to convey this message. It is a form of rhetorical argument known as diatribe that gets its point across without necessarily naming the ones in question.¹³ This is best evidenced here when he uses the supposed "man who says he has faith" and distinguishes him from the brothers, asking, "What use is it, my brothers, if a certain man. . . ?" This method of argumentation also uses short questions that make a point indirectly, as demonstrated in the question of usefulness, and in the phrase "Is that faith able to save him?" However, it must be remembered that James is intending this argument to be pointed toward certain ones amongst the brothers who are guilty of the problem. He shows this later in verse 16 where he uses the words "one from among

¹¹ Sophie Laws, *Harper's New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of James* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980) 119.

¹² It is argued by Kendall that the **αὐτὸν** used in 2: 14 is necessarily referring to the **πτῶξον** who was mentioned in 2:6 (Kendall, *Once Saved 207-17*). This seems to strain much of accepted Greek syntax when there is a much more likely referent found in the immediate context of 2:14. To stretch the antecedent of this pronoun to 2:6 seems to be an unwarranted presupposition, especially since James feels it necessary to refer to the poor again in 2:15-16. It is also interesting to note that **αὐτὸν** is masculine, accusative, singular (movable *v* is unlikely). James illustrates his concept of the poor in 2:15 as including both male and female. It seems awkward to say that James has changed his understanding of referents for *αὐτὸν* between 2:14 and 2:15-16 when 2:15-16 is a direct illustration of 2:14.

¹³ For a further discussion of 'diatribe' see Adamson, James 103-4, or Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (rev. H. Greeven and ed. H. Koester; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 150ff.

you" and returns to addressing them directly as the guilty parties. The argumentation of James does not make its point of reference someone outside the group to which he is speaking, but rather finds its audience within the group. The man that James states "says he has faith" must be found within the intended audience of the letter. Could it be said that James is simply drawing an analogy similar to what the believers might be experiencing with someone outside of their fellowship? This would allow for the possible translation of **tij** to be *any man*. If we take the statement exclusive of the context, this is a plausible argument. However, James is not leaving the identity of the intended man so obscure. He identifies the workless faith of "those from among you" as equally useless and insufficient for salvation. This means that James is associating the man with the group of believers. He is one who professes faith in Christ, and in fact this is what James states, "If a man says he has faith," ultimately referencing the same faith that is mentioned in 2:1, "faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ." This association with the audience of believers makes **tij** seem more specific and is better understood to refer to a *certain man*. James is not stating that the man is a true believer; in fact the distinction between a believer and this man is the intent of James' singling him out. But James does understand him to be within the group of professing believers.

The syntactical construction of the phrase "If a certain man says he has faith" is somewhat helpful in understanding the meaning here as well. The third class conditional clause used with the subjunctive mood would indicate that there is a probable future condition in the mind of the author. James views this individual as one who will claim to have faith. James uses the probable future condition to establish what he believes to be the position of the "certain man," but he is not willing to accept this claim at face value. He rejects the presence of true faith by measuring it according to its lack of works. James' use of the probable future condition sets up the position of a hypothetical man whom he expects to be found within the intended audience of the letter. James can then take issue with what he understands to be a fallacious claim. James uses the third class conditional protasis and the subjunctive mood to establish a position on which he then casts much doubt.¹⁴

It may be quite appropriate to comment here on the doubt that James is implying. He is not necessarily making a dogmatic claim as to the profession of faith not being true, but he is also not taking this profession at face value. It would be quite proper for James to make some allowance and even use hypothetical argumentation since he is evi-

¹⁴ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume VI* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933) 33-34.

dently separated from most of the Christian Jews who will read this letter. But it is also quite appropriate for him to convey a certain amount of convictional and even judgmental authority due to his position in the church and the responsibilities that position would entail. James is making every effort to define for his readers the type of faith by which he expects them to be saved.

It may well be asked whether the faith in view is a faith in the saving work of Christ or simply a faith that the man in question has in his mind as a possible mere intellectual assent expressed in a lifeless proclamation or creed. James has used the word faith four times in the previous context: first, in relation to testing it through the endurance of trials (1:2-4); second, he uses it in the context of asking in faith and not having any doubt (1:6); third, he uses it in relation to how it is viewed with respect to others (2: 1); and fourth, he uses it to describe the poor whom God had chosen to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom (2:5). All four of these usages seem to have the true faith that is unto eternal salvation in mind, even though they may be used in a very pragmatic sense.¹⁵ This is especially true of the second usage which is qualified by the phrase "in our Lord Jesus Christ," and the fourth usage which relates to those chosen by God to be the heirs of the kingdom. James has assumed all of these usages to contain true faith and he does not change his view of the essence of faith in 2: 14-26. True faith is that which is expressed by Abraham and Rahab. These are set in contrast with the man who "says" he has faith. The understanding that James has of saving faith does not change in this passage. However, the man in question evidently has a different view of faith than what James understands faith to be.¹⁶ There is not something

¹⁵ James H. Ropes, James 203.

¹⁶ This explains why James centers on this man's proclamation of faith as distinct from his own definition of authentic faith. Cf. Calvin, *James* 309-10, and Polhill, "Prejudice" 400-401. James is not necessarily viewing this statement in 2:14 as a different kind of faith, rather he sees it as true faith being misrepresented. The man in question evidently has a view of faith that is not complete. Davids describes this use of James phrasing as having a different definitional quality (Peter H. Davids, "Theological Perspectives on the Epistle of James" *JETS* 23/2 [June, 1980] 102-3). Later in the development of this thought, he explains that James is using the definitional qualities to make the distinction between true faith that acts and false faith that does not act. This would certainly seem to fit with the way that the man's faith is granted for the sake of argument, but James does not see it going any further than that when he states that it will not "save" and in reality is non-existent, or "dead." Calvin also makes a distinction between the two faiths when he speaks of Jesus not entrusting Himself to those who only believed on His miracles in John 2:23 (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948] 100-10J). MacArthur also gives a description of the distinctives made between various types of faith (MacArthur, "Faith" 22-23). Huther gives a good development on the meaning of faith without making definitional distinctions (J. E. Huther, *Heinrich A. W. Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament: The*

lacking in faith per se, but there is something lacking in this man's understanding of it. This accounts for the doubtfulness that James has in the man's claim of faith. The difference seems to be directly related to the qualification James makes of the man having "no works." James has made the statement that the man "says" he has faith, however doubtful it may be. He now further explains that this man has no works, providing the only possible reason within the immediate context to doubt the faith of the man in question. For James, the profession did not seem to convince him of the reality of the faith. Now we see the reasoning behind the doubt: the man has no works and so his profession of faith is called into question.

Next James points to the lack of works in this man's faith and asks, "Is that faith able to save him?" expecting a negative answer. This does not mean that James is promoting works as a means to, or a condition for, the salvation in question, he does not ask, "Is this lack/abundance of works able to save him?" He focuses still on the faith in question and makes it the determinant of the salvation he has in mind. The faith is the ultimate test of this salvation. However, it must not be ignored that he also makes the lack of works the reason for the doubtfulness of the man's profession of faith. Works appear to be the test of the faith James has in mind as the type of faith that will save. James says plainly that the man who is claiming faith, but not doing works, does not have a faith that can save.¹⁷ To some observers, this might seem to fly in the face of free grace if eternal salvation is in view, but the argument does not stop with only this evidence.

James has presented an analogy in the preceding context of 2:1-13 concerning people who are exercising their "proclamation" of faith by disobeying the law. Naturally the first objection that would come to the mind of James' audience would be that obedience to the law does not bring one to salvation. James is not claiming that it does, but he is saying that the known, willful disobedience they are displaying causes him to question their salvation.¹⁸

General Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude [New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887] 86-88). These articles capture the essence of the definitional distinctions.' However, it should be noted that the redefinition focuses on the proclamation of faith made by the man in question, not the way in which faith itself can take on various meanings. Those who wish to find the definition of faith remaining the same throughout the entire argument of James have the right idea, but they push it too far when they presuppose a view of temporal salvation and eternal rewards being James' main concern; cf. Radmacher, "First Response" 37-3S.

¹⁷ It is very likely that James is also condemning those who are not "willing" to do works. This is established by the way James addresses the attitude of the "one who says" in 2:15-16 when he opts not to help those who are in need, even though the need is recognized.

¹⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor, 1989) 132-33.

He goes even further to explain in the verses following 14 that their blatant and sinful disregard for their brother or sister causes him to pronounce their faith dead. What is a dead faith? It may be defined as a faith that is inactive, of which James has already explained will not save (2:14).¹⁹ It is a faith that has separated the active pursuit of works from the simple proclamation of creed. James is not willing to accept the proclamation alone as sufficient evidence for salvation when the one making it is denying the opportunity before him to do works.²⁰ A dead faith may also be defined as that which the demons in verse 19 possess, a faith that does have knowledge and even belief in God, but is not willing to expend any effort for God, and in fact may work in opposition to God. James' view of faith does not change in this argument. He still has in mind the faith that is in "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ," and the faith that is held by those who are heirs to the kingdom. This is the faith that is somewhat in opposition to the "proclaimed" faith of the supposed man in verse 14 and to the "dead" faith of the verses following. When he explains that faith without works is dead, he is not saying that it has become weak and died. He is describing it as a faith that never was, non-existent in the eyes of James, and ultimately in the eyes of God.

The appeal mentioned briefly above to a "proclamation" of faith as the sole requirement for salvation seems to be just what James expects his audience to make when presented with the law in 2:1-13, and would explain why he introduces his argument in the immediately following context of 2:14-26. This is where we need to turn our attention next, the context surrounding 2:14.

The Meaning of **SWZW** in Surrounding Context

We must now focus our study on what the best understanding of the word **SWZW** is in the larger context surrounding verse 14. We have already shown that the faith that James has in mind as efficacious for salvation and the faith the man in question has in mind are two very different understandings of faith. It is obvious that James would not affirm the propagation of a faith that would not be able to save anyone in the sense he has presented in 2:14. We have also seen that the man in question has a faith that will not save. Our focus in this section will be to understand the salvation as it is set in the whole of James' intention.

¹⁹ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon* 104, and Ropes, *James* 217.

²⁰ This is a distinctively different situation from the thief on the cross whom Jesus said would be with Him that day. Jesus knew the man's heart, James makes no claim to know this objector's heart. Instead, James bases his exhortation on the opportunity for works that he has seen this objector fail to carry out. James is not arguing for a works foundation for salvation, rather he is imploring them toward a grace foundation for living.

Let us begin our study with the salvation that is presented in the earlier portions of James' letter. One might see 2:14ff. to be connected directly with 1:22, which is very true in regard to the same type of thought, that being the active pursuit of works.²¹ This presents us with an interesting determination of how to define the verb **swzai** in 1:21 and 2:14. They are both aorist, active, infinitives, and both follow the verb **dunamai**--"to be able." There are in fact three occurrences of this complementary construction in the book of James, the third being found in 4:12. In this verse, it is substantial to note that God is established as the One who is able to save and to destroy. This is given in the context of the law and resultantly must carry some reference to eternal salvation.²² It is likely that this is the main emphasis. This does not provide that the other two examples necessarily carry the same emphasis, but it does prove that James can in fact use this meaning. Let us now turn our attention to the two usages earlier in James.

In 1:18, James has just pronounced their existence as Christians being due to the means of the "word of truth" in the exercise of God's will. This "word" is further made active in their lives by the receiving of it implanted. This is where the description of the "word" is given as "able to save your souls" or "able to save your lives." The salvation in mind here may very well deal with a present salvation from death, or even a prolonging or prosperity in physical life.²³ This is well supported by the man's being blessed in what he does in 1:25, providing that a necessarily corresponding relationship between the "doing" and the "blessed" is present in the intended meaning. It also may very well have in mind the eternal salvation that has just been mentioned. This undoubtedly has some weight in James' mind since he substantiated the "word" as the means of their eternal life (1:18) and continues to promote this "word" as their sustenance for attaining some type of salvation (1:21) and their authority for instruction (1:22-23).

There is likely a good deal of reference by James back to the passages that he has referred to earlier in the letter in 1:9-11 (Psalm 103: 15-16, Isaiah 40:6-7). These Old Testament passages speak of the

²¹ Hodges, *Dead Faith* 12-13, and *Gospel Under Siege* 23-26.

²² Manton, *James* 385-86. Laws presents a viewpoint which limits the judgment in 4:12 strictly to a statement of character with no temporal reference to future judgment (Laws, *James* 188). However, such a view does not seem to agree with her own development of 4:10 on page 185 being a possible aphorism to the gospel parable that ultimately relates to justification in the sight of the Son of Man, especially since 4:11-12 seems to be an illustration of proper humility before God, or the lack thereof.

²³ Hodges, *Absolutely* 120-22, and *Dead Faith* 12-13. Glaze sees this passage as dealing only with eternal realities, but this seems to leave little room for the present realities that are made so vivid in earlier portions of chapter 1 to take on the full shape of their existence (R. E. Glaze, Jr., "The Relationship of Faith to Works," *The Theological Educator* 34 [Fall, 1986] 35-38).

fading and withering that takes place in grass and the things of the earth. They also speak in the very next verses of the eternality of the Lord. In Isaiah, it speaks of His word standing forever. In Psalm 103, David says in the next verse that the loyal love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. These references would undoubtedly come to the minds of the Jewish readers when they heard of the temporality of men, especially rich men. It would seem quite likely that they would also remember the eternal aspects of the Lord, and the impact of His "word." The same "word" that brought them forth and saves their souls is the "word" that stands forever, the "word" that is eternal. The resultant meaning in this passage would then have a dual concept of present and eternal realization in view.

If 2:14 is necessarily connected with this argument, it stands to reason that it must also carry some of the same connotations with the emphasis being to one usage or the other, either present or eternal salvation. Those who would find this the best route to follow state that James appears to be using 1:21 as the theme for 1:21-2:26. It is then argued that throughout this passage, James is necessarily seen to be reflecting back on this theme in every reference to works and salvation. They state that James is loosely organized in his teachings, and stretches from one line of thought to another without any real warning.²⁴ As seen thus far in this study, this would give (**SWZW**) a resultant meaning of both eternal and present salvation in 2:14. However, the argument cannot end here in a speculative reorganization of the thought of James.²⁵

It has become increasingly clear to this observer that the teaching of James relies on some unified thought and could be better understood accordingly. If we look at the argument of James 2:1-26 as more of a single unit, albeit with reminders back to chapter 1, there are several things which stand out as rather distinct patterns in James' logic. James begins in verse 1 with an appeal to them as Christians not to hold their faith in a manner unbecoming the attitude of a Christian. He follows this with an example of how this is taking place in their assembly. This example closes by comparing them to judges with evil motives.

James then points out that their association with the rich is actually association with the enemy, and their treatment of the poor is not

²⁴ Hodges, *Dead Faith* 12-13, and *Gospel Under Siege* 23-24. Some even interpret James as comprising completely separate teachings with very little, if any, connection from one thought to the next; cf. Dibelius, *James* 1-11, 149.

²⁵ Huther also argues that there is a direct connection between the two passages, but sees the only referent to be eternal salvation (Huther, *James* 86). As was observed earlier with respect to Glaze's article, such a position does not seem to allow for the full expression of the intent in chapter 1.

in accord with the royal law since the poor are actually the ones who are to be their brothers in Christ. This being established, James calls their attention to the fact that they are transgressors of the whole law and not just one part of it.

He continues by appealing to them to act as if they were to be judged by the law of liberty, this is the same law that previously in 1:25 was the perfect law and by abiding according to it, a man shall become blessed in all that he does. In the instance of 2:13, James is referring to this law and the judgment that pertains to it, likely eschatological judgment.²⁶ Whatever else may be included in this law, it appears that there is at least some relation to the Decalogue and also possibly to the commands of Christ. It is seen to be "merciless to one who is not doing (showing) mercy."

From the standpoint of the recipients, James' audience is undoubtedly expecting him -to remember the statement that he has made in verse 1 pertaining to their faith in Jesus Christ and not to present them with any type of an appeal to the law, especially not judgment by any law. With this judgment being presented to them as incentive, it seems to be a direct affront to their freedom from the law that was accomplished by Christ and His salvation. The natural response would be to say, "What judgment could I possibly fall under? I have faith, faith has set me free from any judgment. James, you must be mistaken to think that my works are a necessity, I have faith!" This seems to be an especially probable response for the audience James has in view. Most of his letter is devoted to showing them that they are lacking in discipline in many areas of their spiritual and physical lives. This appeal by James' readers is the direct link between 2:1-13 and 2:14-26.

The natural appeal to faith as the overriding bypass to works is expected by James. He has written with reference to the law to intentionally convict those who are not in obedience to its precepts. James expects his readers to attempt to render impotent his exhortation to avoid judgment. Their only hope to show judgment as having no authority over them is to appeal to faith alone, which James answers in his brief discussion with the objector in 2: 14-26. This explains the necessity for James to include this section in his letter and fits well with the context of both the passage and his readers..

An appeal to faith alone from his readers must be an appeal to the faith unto eternal life since there could be little else in view when an appeal of this nature is made. If reward or blessing were the only ref-

²⁶ The Jewish mind would likely have referenced this judgment, or any other, to be related to the final judgment that would come during the last times. Cf. Davids, *James* 119, Dymess, "Mercy triumphs" 12, and Lorin L. Cranford, "An Exposition of James 2," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 29/1 (Fall, 1986) 12,26.

erents of the judgment, certainly James' audience does not expect to gain them by an appeal to faith alone as the purchasing agent. James has already shown that abiding is what makes a man blessed in what he does (1:25), and that the reward of the crown of life is given to the one who has shown himself to be approved by perseverance under trial. Eternal salvation must be the referent in view. Certainly it does not have to be limited to this since it was unlikely for the Christian Jew to think of the two as necessarily separated, but this must be the main emphasis here.

As a result, this gives us the emphasis of meaning that the verb **SWZW** necessarily must employ in 2:14. It is not necessarily connected to the salvation that is described in 1:21. The salvation that is described there has both eternal and temporal ramifications as its primary meaning. Instead, 2:14 must be understood as a response of James to the obvious objection that his readers would make when confronted with judgment according to the law. They appeal to faith alone to render this judgment incapable of accusing them. This is done according to an understanding that they have the purchasing agent out from under such a judgment. The judgment that James is speaking of and that they are attempting to avoid is one that appears to be optional. The only judgment that is described as optional is the final judgment, not judgment for rewards. Therefore, **SWZW** must have eternal salvation as its main referent with any other quality of meaning being rather small.⁷

This being the understanding of **SWZW**, let us examine, the entire verse to see what James has in mind in it. "What is the use, my brothers, if a certain one should say he has faith, but does not have works? Is that faith able to save him?" The appeal to faith from James' audience does not carry any weight for their eternal salvation since they cannot prove their faith to be a reality. This proof is ultimately not to be found in their simple proclamation of faith, but rather in the accompanying works. If they were making this proclamation, but not living like they were in fact part of the Christian family, works included, James was not convinced of their eternal salvation and appealed to them on that basis.²⁸

Historical Context

James was a leader of the early church in one of its more difficult periods. Persecution and ridicule by the public, and especially fellow

²⁷ Davids, James 120, Foerster, *TDNT* 995, Martin, *James* 81, Moo, *James* 101, and Schneider, *New International Dictionary* 216. For many others who concur, please reference many of the commentaries and related articles included in footnote 1 above.

²⁸ Chafer takes this view in his understanding of the foundation for James' appeal to works in light of true saving faith (Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Salvation* (Findlay: Dunham, 1917) 82-83).

Jews, was to be expected. Being a leader, he would naturally be concerned about the witness and impact of the church to those around it, but even more importantly, he would be concerned about the welfare of those that were "in his care," so to speak. When these that he was directly or indirectly responsible for were not living up to the call, it was natural for him to be concerned. When they were not paying heed to the call, it was natural, and in fact quite proper, for him to doubt their authenticity. The audience that James had in mind was not ignorant of the teachings of the church. They knew what their relationship to Christ and His body should be. James was not trying to cause undue concern in his congregation, but he was trying to bring them one step closer in their relationship to Christ, even if that meant showing them their need for a more true introduction to Christ.

When reading through these arguments written by James, it is difficult not to be reminded of many passages that Jesus taught. Since this was likely one of the first books of the New Testament in circulation, it is improbable that there were many of the written gospel accounts available. However, James evidently had many of Jesus' sayings in mind or in written form when he wrote much of this letter. Luke records in the first few verses of his Gospel record that there were various reports being transferred amongst the people (1:1ff.). These may have been written or spoken accounts, which he then took the time to compile into one "consecutive" account.

When reading in particular of the judgment that James speaks of in chapter 2, the observer cannot help but think of Matthew 25:31ff. where Jesus speaks of His separating the sheep and the goats according to their works. Here deeds are the basis for inclusion or exclusion in relation to the kingdom.²⁹

Most vivid in its direct correlation is the relation between James 2:14-26 and Matthew 7:13-23. In this passage, consent and profession are not the final determinants for acceptance into the kingdom. Rather, it is the decisive activity in accord with the proclamation of faith and devotion.³⁰ Jesus' teaching seems to directly parallel that of James which is true of much of the book of James and the Sermon on the Mount.³¹

V. POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS

Finally, we turn to examine several possible objections to the view supported here. These will be presented briefly, followed by

²⁹ Davids, *James* 38-39.

³⁰ Cranford, "Exposition of James 2" 25-26.

³¹ Peter H. Davids, *James* 47-51, D. Edmund Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* (Chicago: Moody, 1979) 17, and Martin, *James* lxxiv-lxxvi.

responses from the understanding that seems best to fit the intent of James.

1. First, it is objected that **SWZW** in other places in the book of James means strictly or more emphatically the salvation from a present concern. As a result, it should be understood accordingly in 2:14. It is argued that James uses this more likely meaning in 5:15, 20 and it is unlikely that he would change his meaning here.³²

This is a valid objection to consider since James' intent is to clarify, not to confuse, and to provide a unified understanding, not a disconnected group of words and phrases. However, the first observation that needs to be made of such an objection is that there had to be some indicator that led James' readers to believe that he was using this specific meaning of **SWZW** in those verses. That indicator, to be precise, would have to come from the immediate context of the verses surrounding the word or phrase in question. Good hermeneutics demands that a word's meaning must ultimately be determined from the context in which the author has presented it. With an understanding of the author's intent being our final goal, each context must be the primary consideration in interpreting specific statements. Other qualifications and definitions, such as comparison of other contexts and passages within the same book or other books, can certainly, and often do, have an impact on the meaning of a given word in its context, but that word's immediate context is the final authority. We have been shown by the exegesis presented in this paper that the context of James 2:14 allows, and even requires, an eternal salvation emphasis in the manner in which the verb **SWZW** is used within that verse.

Those who make the objection that **SWZW** has the same meaning in all its usages in the letter of James are not willing to allow a passage's immediate context to dictate what is the meaning of the author. The same is true of those who say that the meaning of **SWZW** in James 2:14 is necessarily a derivative of its usage in 1:21 without giving substantial warrant to claim -this. The only warrant that is usually attached to such a claim is that it is the same word and a very similar subject matter. These are helpful in enlightening possibilities of meaning, but must not be the overarching guide in determining the final meaning.³³

2. A second objection certainly comes to mind when speaking of the eternal ramifications of the verb **SWZW** in the question, "Why did

³² Hodges, *Dead Faith* 12-13, and *Gospel Under Siege* 26-27.

³³ Radmacher, for example, recognizes that the problem of not dealing with the context can, and does, occur with respect to the use of the term **SWZW**, but apparently he fails to carry his reasoning through in the application of his hermeneutic. He, like Hodges, has already assumed a definition before coming to the context of James 2:14. (Radmacher, "First Response" 39-40).

James not make any type of reference to the Gospel if he was concerned about their salvation from eternal damnation?"³⁴

This is a logical question since James does not make any mention of them receiving Christ, per se. One must be careful, however, when assigning any weight to an argument from silence. James does refer to them receiving the word, this being the instrument by which they were brought forth (1:18-21). But within this appeal there is no reference to the death and resurrection of Christ. We need not look far for an answer to the reason why there is no reference.

James was a leader of the church in Jerusalem and would certainly be recognized by any that had contact with Christianity, especially by any Jews, whether they be in Jerusalem or in the "diaspora," as James calls it. This letter would be meaningless to anyone who was not already familiar with Christianity and James could certainly assume that any who would read it would already be familiar with the essentials of the Gospel. Therefore, James can assume that they would already have the foundational knowledge of what constituted the Gospel message. His purpose was not to be redundant or to explain to those in the congregation who weren't believers what was the common creed. Instead, he wished to convict them of the areas in which they were falling short. The result is that he found it necessary to give an exhortation to them to receive more than simple knowledge, even to believe, for the demons were capable of that. The need that he saw amongst the dispersed Christians was to be pushed to live in accord with the profession of faith in Christ, even if this meant that they had to enter into true faith for the first time. James could count on them knowing the essentials of the Gospel plan. He simply showed them the full picture.

3. A related objection is that since James calls the readers "brothers," they must all be saved Christians.³⁵

This argument tends to take too much for granted in proving that they are in fact Christians. It assumes that the term "brother" is used in a very technical sense, similar to the way that Paul used the word in many of his writings. This does not seem to be necessary in light of the situation of James. He is a Jew, in a Jewish community, writing to Jews. It was a common practice for a Jew to call a fellow Jew brother, whether Christian or non-Christian. It was also certainly customary for the Christian community to use the term brother when speaking to fel-

³⁴ Hodges, *Absolutely* 124-25.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 124-25; cf. also Hodges, *Dead Faith* 9-10, Dibelius, *James* 178, and Ryrie, *Great* 74. Radmacher also appears to defend such a view (Radmacher, "First Response" 37). However, in accusing MacArthur of begging the question on this issue, Radmacher does not seem to recognize that he follows the same hermeneutical procedure as MacArthur in supporting his own viewpoint.

low Christians. But this does not necessitate that the term be used in a theologically precise manner when applied to every one of James' readers.³⁶ The situation of a contemporary pastor makes a good illustration.

It is doubtful that any pastor of a church today assumes that every person in his congregation is saved, especially if that congregation is spread abroad like James'. Just because someone in a church today is called "member" does not mean that they have received the gift of salvation, even amongst a supposed regenerate membership. James gives his readers the benefit of the doubt, like most pastors generally would, but he also does not hesitate to explain various aspects of salvation in relation to the "word" (2:18), and as we have shown earlier, the "works" (2:14), for the sake of those he considers unsaved.

4. A fourth objection states that the judgment referred to by James in 2:12-13 is not in any way related to the judgment unto hell from which Christ has saved His followers. Instead, this must refer to some other form of judgment.³⁷ Such an objection must first call into question the content of the law of liberty that James has in mind in 1:25 and 2:1-13. Those who make this objection are forced to say that it does not necessarily have to be inclusive of all parts of the Mosaic law since the only citations James makes are to the Decalogue and possibly a few teachings of Jesus. The result of such a limitation in the law is then understood to limit the judgment as well, often understood to be a judgment of rewards which will be considered in the next objection.

It is true that only the Decalogue and possibly Christ's teaching are referred to here, and the Decalogue may in fact be assimilated as well into the teachings and commands of Christ, but let us first look at the context in which Christ presented his teaching on the second greatest commandment, which incidentally, is found in Leviticus 19.³⁸ Christ Himself was certainly in favor of the keeping of the law in Matthew 5:17-20. Later in the same book, 22:34ff., Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment, to which he answered "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." He continued to give the second greatest, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." This second commandment is the same one that

³⁶ MacArthur makes this same point; however, does not make mention of the evidence of James' very strategic, and even precarious, Jewish/Christian position (MacArthur, "Faith" 29).

³⁷ Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege* 26-27.

³⁸ For a brief development of this correlation, see footnote #64 of Cranford's "Exposition of James 2," 24. For a more lengthy and complete study, see Luke T. Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *JBL* 101/3 (September, 1982) 391-401.

James has quoted for his audience. There were certainly distinctions to be made between the purposes behind Moses' and Christ's use of the law and intent in relating it to the people, such as the case of the sacrificial law, but there are also many similarities. In all of the passages mentioned thus far, obedience is the expected outcome from the exhortation. When James mentions the whole law, his readers would undoubtedly remember how Christ had used the phrase "whole law" in Matthew 22:34ff. It is also likely that they would remember the way in which Christ had spoken of the completion of the law to take place in Him, but not the abolition of the law. He still expected them to obey the law given to Moses, the whole law, which also may be understood as the moral precepts found within the law, until the kingdom is established. The key to this argument is found in the fact that James, like Christ, expects his readers to act in a manner that represents obedience to the whole law. James explains that they should act as though they were to be judged by the law. James' readers who are unwilling to attempt keeping the precepts of the law will naturally try to find a way out from under it. The appeal James expects them to make is to faith alone. But James explains that their kind of faith is not the kind that will save them or anyone, being only a belief that is no more than that of the demons.

There can be no doubt that obedience to these commands, and in fact the whole law would certainly come to the forefront of the minds of James' readers, especially when the judgment in verse 13 appears to give a reference to final judgment and since James has just explained that the one who breaks a part of the law actually breaks the whole law. This gives us a more vivid picture of exactly why the appeal to faith would be their first recourse against such demands. However, it must be remembered that James does not say that they will necessarily be judged by the law he has referred to, but he does appeal to them to act as though they were to be judged by it. This leads us to our next objection.

5. As stated above, the fifth objection concerns the judgment in view and the possibility of rewards. Those who are opposed to this judgment being one which will convict lost sinners of sin and sentence them to eternal damnation are forced to make this the judgment that will take place when Christ judges the Christian's works and gives out rewards based upon that judgment.³⁹

This does not seem to align with the reasoning that James presents. To begin with, every Christian will pass through the judgment of Christ that pertains to Christian rewards, all would agree to this. But James does not seem to have such a required judgment in mind.

³⁹ Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege* 26.

Instead, he is thinking of judgment as something that can be escaped through true faith. If such a judgment unto rewards were in view, why would he appeal to it as optional (2:12-13) and even present deliverance from it as essential for the Christian (2:14-"save" or "deliver")? In 2:12-13, James has stated that there is a way to triumph over, meaning to "exult over" or "boast against," judgment.⁴⁰ This way is found in showing mercy and acting in accord with the law of liberty. If taken by itself this could be understood as a meritorious type of accomplishing works to be brought through the judgment, such as that in 1 Corinthians 3. When a believer is judged for rewards, this judgment is based upon the accomplishments of that believer. This would necessitate that the judgment James speaks of has the accomplishments of those passing through as its main subject for scrutiny. However, such an understanding is not borne out in the text. James speaks of a judgment quite the opposite from that of rewards. The judgment he is warning against is based upon sin (2:9-11), not upon the works of the person. The judgment that he has in mind does not look at the accomplishments of the person, rather it inspects the person's sinful transgression and judges upon that basis. This type of judgment is not with a view to reward, but with a view to convict and punish.

When James appeals to the law, he expects his audience to appeal to faith as the single agent to deliver them out from under the required judgment by the law. One would expect James to appeal to them on the basis of a forfeiture of reward if such a judgment unto rewards is in view, but he does not. He appeals to their salvation and deliverance from judgment, not a salvation which will prolong their temporal life or add to their reward in heaven, but a salvation which is ultimately unto eternal life.

6. A sixth objection takes issue with the traditional understanding of the definition of a "dead faith." The objectors argue that James could not possibly have had eternal salvation in mind since "the faith that is now dead must once have been alive, just as a dead body must once have had life."⁴¹

This argument is supported mainly by an appeal to the fact that dead faith is compared to a dead body in 2:26. This may seem like a relatively literal way of thinking of this analogy, but it seems that in so doing, it proves too much. Let us see how this would be understood if taken completely in the literal sense: Faith without works is dead. The body without the spirit is dead. The body cannot be made physically

⁴⁰ For a representative definition of **katakauxaomi**, see G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986) 234.

⁴¹ Much of the argument in Hodges' *Dead Faith* rests upon this assumption (cf. 7-9). Cf. also Hodges, *Absolutely* 125-26, and Hodges *Gospel Under Siege* 19-20.

alive again (until the rapture). So also faith must be, according to this view, lying in a state of dormancy, waiting to be revived. James does seem to be assuming that faith can be brought into an active state, but only by the decision willingly to do works by the one who has the faith. Is James also saying that if one who has died decides he wants to live again, he will in fact be raised from the dead due to his own decision, or is James saying that, since we on earth have the ability to decide to revive our faith, we also have the power to decide who shall be raised physically from the dead? This hardly seems likely.

James is not using this analogy to show that what was once alive must be made alive again. His purpose behind using this illustration is to show those who hold only to a dead belief that their faith is useless and void. It is void for any usefulness to the poor who need help, and even void for their own salvation. They have not lost their faith, as the body has been separated from the soul. Neither is it lying in a state of dormancy. Instead, they have never had true faith.

It seems more literal and understandable to see James' analogy in a somewhat figurative sense. James is making an analogy of the body without the spirit to show that faith without works is just as inactive and just as useless. He has not assumed that the faith must have once been alive or that it must, in essence, be raised from the dead. Such an argument does not agree with the purpose James has in mind.⁴²

7. Some objections that certainly have been made to the book of James deal with the apparent discrepancy between the letter of James and the letters of Paul. It is not within the scope of this paper to remedy each and every apparent discrepancy between James and Paul. Such discussions have been given ample consideration elsewhere.⁴³ Instead, we shall look at the overriding intent of each author and see why the divergence may appear.

Each author, James and Paul, was in a particular position and also dealt with a specific occasion. As has been stated previously, James

42 MacArthur makes this distinction quite clearly as well by showing that it is not works that keeps faith alive, but rather faith is made alive as an impartation of God. From this MacArthur draws the conclusion that James "pictures works as the invigorating force and faith as the body" (MacArthur, "Faith" 31-32). Saucy explains that MacArthur may have misconstrued the point of the analogy. He rightly understands the main point to be that works are evidential of living and useful faith. A dead faith is evidenced by no works being present. Similarly a dead body is evidenced by no spirit being present (Robert L. Saucy, "Second Response to 'Faith According to the Apostle James' by John F. MacArthur, Jr.," *JETS* 33/1 (March, 1990) 44.

43For some remarks alluding to this view, see James Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 251-52 and a brief study on the subject by Thorwald Lorenzen, "Faith without Works does not count before God! James 2:14-26," *ExpTim* 89/8 (May, 1978) 233-34. For a development of the argument with rebuttal, see Rakestraw, "James 2:14-26" 31-50, and G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 131-40.

was a leader of the Jerusalem church and his concerns would mainly have been with the ongoing preservation and building up of the believers within the Jerusalem church and those who would be in close contact with the dispersed church and its teachings. This ultimately would have made him very subjective when it comes to the faith and ongoing works of the believers. James was concerned with developing the beliefs and habits of those who had been Christians for a long time and convicting those who thought they were, but really weren't. His main interest would have been with the sanctification of the believers, their practical justification.

Paul, on the other hand, was very evangelistically minded in his teaching, and these teachings were targeted mainly for people outside of familiarity with any proper type of works within a Jewish religious perspective. His presentations to these people would naturally be from a very objective viewpoint in the eyes of God. Paul was concerned with bringing people to faith who had never heard the Gospel of Christ. He did not neglect to demand changed lives, but he did not emphasize such things, as forthrightly as does James, as a necessary ingredient to the acceptance of the Gospel of Christ. This does not make the emphasis unnecessary, it was simply not appropriate in the timing of Paul to present this in his initial appeals to belief. Paul's greatest concern at this point was with the justification, not the sanctification, of the believer.

Each author had his own purposes and his own way of presenting the truth he felt his audience needed to hear. If we understand them as writing to very different groups of people, and from very different situations, it becomes much easier to understand why there is a sense of diversity between them. They do not disagree. They simply have different emphases within their teachings.⁴⁴

8. The eighth objection relates to what constitutes the faith that is mentioned in 2:14. The objectors state that James, in asking, "Is that faith able to save him?," is not making an entreaty to the proclamation of faith just mentioned, but rather to real saving faith in Christ. This argument hinges upon the definite article that does not appear in 2:14 with the professed faith (first occurrence of **pistij**), but does occur with the faith that is ultimately not able to save (second occurrence of **pistij**). It is said that such divergence in the writing of the article is of no significance and the faith in view is true faith.⁴⁵

It is true that the article was certainly optional at times in the mind of the Greek, but in a direct argument, such as the one presented

⁴⁴ Moo, *James* 108-17. MacArthur also develops this understanding briefly; cf. MacArthur, "Faith" 27-28.

⁴⁵ Dibelius, *James* 152, and Hodges, *Dead Faith* 11, and *Gospel Under Siege* 22-23. An interpretation that this position suggests is also assumed in Hodges' *Absolutely* 124-25.

here by James, it is highly unlikely that he is simply being careless in his writing method. The use of the article in such a case as this is more likely anaphoric. Since James has already referred to a certain faith in the immediately preceding sentence, it seems most appropriate for him to be specifying the kind of faith he has just mentioned. This would allow for the interpretation of "that faith" or "such faith" in his second usage. Usage of the article in other passages of James must be determined by their own context, and it must also be allowed for context to determine the proper meaning here.⁴⁶

Those who would like to understand the faith in 2:14 to be true faith hope to force the issue with an appeal to works being understood to be a condition for salvation if faith is taken to be other than true faith. The purpose behind such an appeal is to push those who would affirm salvation by grace into saying two contradictory things. First that salvation is by grace through faith, as all would agree, and second that works is a necessary condition for faith, which contradicts the first statement. The objectors find a way out of this predicament by understanding this faith as true faith and the works being a condition for rewards. However, as was shown above rewards is not what James had in mind when he speaks of judgment and salvation. Therefore, faith if must be understood to be something other than true faith.

The objectors seem to be showing too much of a bias in the assumptions behind such an argument. Faith and works do not necessarily have to be diametrically opposed to one another. It seems to fit James' understanding best to find faith as the purchasing agent of salvation, but not if it is only a statement of creed and not a way of life. Works are the natural expression of that faith. They are not a condition for faith and salvation, but rather an exemplification of it.⁴⁷ If there be any conditions placed upon the faith, they are conditions upon the One in whom the faith is placed, not upon the one who holds the faith, but James by no means places himself in a position to judge conditions, only the observable results.

⁴⁶ A. T. Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James* (Nashville: Broadman, n.d.) 94 n. 2, and Robertson, *Word Pictures* 34. Those who wish to deny this and rely on other instances to prove the point are not dealing with the matter at hand in 2:14-2:17. James uses this segment to show explicitly that that faith, the faith that is only a proclamation, without works is dead. This fits well with James' use of the article in both 2: 14 and 2: 17. After these verses, there is another segment of argumentation started and another objector introduced. Thus, these must be left to speak for themselves.

⁴⁷ Perhaps the best illustration of this connectedness is developed by Ryrie. He states that the faith spoken of in James 2:14-26 is ". . . like a two coupon train or bus ticket. One coupon says, 'Not good if detached' and the other says, 'Not good for passage.' Works are not good for passage, but faith detached from works is not saving faith!" (Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* [Chicago: Moody, 1972] 133-34).

9. There is one final objection which is somewhat peripheral to the issue at hand, but we will give a brief description and answer to it. This objection deals with the use and interpretation of James 2:18-19. The objection made is that these verses do not imply theological import to the argument James is presenting. The reasons for such an assertion by one interpreter are that the one who is speaking here is not James and therefore the debate, when rightly interpreted, centers around pragmatism. This approach is supported by the argument that the word **xwrij**--"without" is not included in "most",⁴⁸ or "the majority of"⁴⁹ Greek manuscripts and in fact the word is replaced by the preposition **ek**--"by."⁵⁰ Much is also made by another interpreter of where to punctuate the verses, resultantly attributing part of the argument to James and part to the supposed debater.⁵¹

Let us begin our discussion with the "most" Greek manuscripts that do not contain the word **xwrij** and replace it with **ek**.⁵² It seems disturbing that most contemporary textual critics have not seen any substantial warrant for an appeal to the aforementioned "most" Greek documents in this instance.⁵³ Just how many there are is not mentioned by the objectors in great detail. However, the qualitative referent in this context seems to be "most," which is a dangerous tool to use when evaluating literary texts. Quantity alone should not be preeminent as a deciding factor.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege* 27.

⁴⁹ Hodges, *Dead Faith* 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 16-17; also Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege* 27-28.

⁵¹ Dibelius, *James* 149-51, 154-58.

⁵² It is explained by Hodges that there are some extant "Byzantine" manuscripts which contain the variant **ek** in place of **xwrij**; (Zane C. Hodges, "Light on James Two from Textual Criticism," *BibSac* 120 [October-December, 1963] 344-47). However it would hardly seem sufficient evidence for qualifying them as "many" while assuming accuracy; see also Zane C. Hodges and Aurthur L. Farstad, *Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982) introductory notes and the critical apparatus on James 2:18.

⁵³ The variant **ek** is considered by many scholars hardly worth including in the critical apparatus, and when it is represented, it is done so with little evidence to recommend it as a preferred reading. This does not necessarily classify it as wrong, but it does cause the variant to be quite suspect. Those who support the "Byzantine" text as the preferred text (also referred to by many proponents as the Majority text) would like to convince critics of its credibility based upon external evidence, especially number of documents. Number is the basis on which supporters of the Majority text rest for their methodology. However, even in his article, Hodges apparently appeals to these texts only to show that such an emendation is possible, not necessary. This is best illustrated by his admission of stronger external evidence in favor of **xwrij**, and his appeal to internal evidence as the ultimate criteria for a final decision; cf. Hodges, "Light on James Two" 347.

⁵⁴ For a generally accepted outline of principles used in textual criticism, see Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987)

The interpretation derived by those who replace **xwrij** with **ek** in 2:18 is "You have faith, and I have works; show to me your faith from (**ek**) your works, and I will show to you, from my works, my faith."⁵⁵ Such a change in translation, as has been well observed by one of its proponents, would reduce the argument of correlation between faith and works to absurdity by the debater.⁵⁶ In other words, there is an underlying assumption made by the debater that neither of the persons involved can in fact show faith through the resultant works. It is then posited that the debater continues on to show James in 2:19 that James' simple creed of "God is one" is not enough to inspire works, but is only a statement of belief. Thus the simple statement of belief is shown to be sterile by the debater who expects James to agree and see the point that faith and works are in no way related. In 2:20ff., James makes his statement in the debate and proves the debater wrong by stating that faith and works are necessarily connected; being best illustrated by Abraham and Rahab.⁵⁷

The problem with such an interpretation is that it greatly reduces the impact of the argument James is using to enforce the relationship between faith and works. The absurdity argument seems to be an appeal to a general principle or simple statement of rebuttal, and an absurd one at that. However, if we see James as the one who is behind the debater asking "professing" believers to show their faith apart from their works, this further convicts them of their false profession in 2:14. In this case, the one who is professing belief is seen to be without a trace of proof to back up the claim. This fits James' situation and intent much better, and in fact makes the argument much more forceful within the context of Jewish believers in the relatively new church community of Christ. The Christian community's validity would often be questioned by those outside it. The orthodox Jew, or anyone else outside Christianity, could not help but wonder at a religion that did not live up to its claims.

275-76. As stated earlier, Hodges in fact admits that he does not wish to rely on this alone when he appeals in his article to internal evidence as the compelling criteria (Hodges, "Light on James Two" 347). For a good discussion of the methodology behind the Majority text, see Zane C. Hodges, *Defense of the Majority Text* (unpublished article available at Dallas Theological Seminary Book Room, no date), or a brief representation of the methodology by the same author in *Which Bible?* (2d ed.; ed. David O. Fuller; Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International, 1971) 25-38. For an insightful critique of the methodology, see Daniel B. Wallace, "Some Second Thoughts on the Majority Text," *BibSac* 146/583 (July-September, 1989) 270-90.

⁵⁵ Hodges, "Light on James Two" 348.

⁵⁶ Hodges, *Gospel Under Siege* 27, and more completely in "Light on James Two" 348.

⁵⁷ This view does not seem to fit well into the surrounding logical context of James 2, nor does it appear to do justice to the argument that James is establishing. For a more complete exposition of the view, see Hodges, "Light on James Two" 347-50.

The interpretation of 2:19-20 in this view understands James to be speaking again in 2:19. He is pointing to their simple profession and comparing it to the worthless professions of the demons. James is saying that the one who relies on such a simple proclamation and is not willing to follow through has no more faith than a demon, which is ultimately worthless for salvation.⁵⁸

The second point that necessarily must be made is that no matter how one punctuates the verse in question, the teaching is still one that James refers to as support for "faith without works is dead." This would mean that one must thereby interpret the passage as one that teaches such a position. This is in fact easily seen no matter who is speaking in the passage, James as the supposed arguer or someone else. The argument still says essentially what James has said already and continues to show by referring to the same conclusion "faith without works is dead," and that a faith true to the professed affirmation is observably active.

The third segment of concern for some with this passage is that it is not introducing any theological appeal into the argument. Whether James or some supposed debater is speaking in verse 19 is of little consequence to this debate. The argument is cited as being in support of what James is presenting, and James ultimately agrees with what is being said. But if the reference is not a supportive theological statement of what true faith must contain, then what else could it possibly be? Is it just an explanation of the demons' monotheism, not relating to their destiny?⁵⁹ Certainly it cannot be only that when we see what the response of the demons is to their belief. They are shuddering. This seems to indicate their knowledge of what is confronting them when they recognize God for who He is. Their ultimate fear is final judgment. Could we possibly suppose that the appeal in this passage is simply a comparison of the present works of the demons here on earth, naturally doing bad works or no works at all, to the good works that are to be representative of the "believer's" life? This seems like an unlikely proposition since the emphasis in verse 19 is not on works, it is on belief. James makes an appeal to this to support his view of works but that is not the object in question at this moment. Instead, the belief that is ascribed to the "proclaiming" believer is being compared to the belief of the demons. To ascribe works to the demons, bad as they may be, could possibly be assumed, but to ascribe any kind of works to the person who simply "believes that God is one" is not something James is likely to do since he appeals to it as an example of

⁵⁸ For a good discussion of this view with a brief explanation of the meaning and impact of 2:19, see Adamson, *James* 293-97.

⁵⁹ Hodges, *Dead Faith* 17, and Rylie, *Great* 121-22.

"dead faith," "faith without works." Therefore, the level of comparison must be maintained on an intellectual level, over and above pragmatism.⁶⁰ Ultimately, theology is introduced when we bring the entire context of the previous few sentences to bear on this verse. Since the argument about the belief of the demons is on an intellectual plane, and not pragmatic, it also follows that what is in view is not any type of possible rewards system or meritorious discussion of faith. This adds credibility to our position on the salvation that James has in mind in 2:14. What James has in view is not a type of meritorious faith, but rather a faith that includes true belief and pragmatic development. In like manner, the salvation that he is presenting here also must not be dealing with the meritorious reward concept, but rather something else. The only option open to us is one that pertains to the eternal salvation of the believer, and resultantly the eternal damnation of the demons.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we should review the understanding of salvation in James 2:14 that was arrived at earlier in this study and suggest some warnings in its use. James 2: 14 speaks of the eternal salvation that is found in Christ and Christ alone as Lord and Savior. The acceptance of Christ is borne out in the life of the believer not through a simple proclamation of faith, but rather in the works that accompany such a statement of belief. If a person is claiming to have saving faith, but is not doing the works that result from the changed life, then that person is not saved according to the teaching of James.

The teaching of James is in complete accord with that which is found in other passages relating to the salvation/works relationship. Jesus spoke of it explicitly when condemning those who only verbalize his Lordship, but do not do the will of His Father (Matt 7:15-27, cf. 5:16). It can also be seen on numerous occasions that Paul speaks strongly concerning the essential expression of faith being found in works (Rom 1:5,2:6-8,6:17-18; 1 Cor 13:2,15:58; 2 Cor 10:5-6; Gal 6:4-8).

The understanding of James 2: 14 espoused in this study is based upon the fact that the word **σωζω** in this verse speaks of eternal salvation, not a deliverance from a present crisis or an earning of rewards. The aspect of eternal salvation was borne out in the differentiation that James made between saving faith and proclaimed faith that has no works. This proclamation of faith was the response James expected to his presentation of the law and judgment. This judgment is not with a view to a meritorious form of works, rather it is based upon transgres-

⁶⁰ Adamson, *James* 294-96, and Davids, *James* 125-26.

sion of the law of liberty, which James explains to be sin. With a proclamation of faith alone being the response that James expects his readers to give as a bypass to this judgment, the judgment must consequently have eternal ramifications. He has shown them in no uncertain terms that such a simple proclamation was not enough to save if the one making it did not have accompanying works.

It may be worthwhile to point out a few possible abuses that could result from this study and others like it. It is best not to forget these temptations when putting the teachings of James into practice.

First, James does not presume to be dogmatic about judging the eternal security or damnation of the people in question, likewise neither should his interpreters pronounce such judgment. The argument of James, however pointed it may be, is still intentionally exhortational toward spurring on his audience to good works and the beginning of a faith that is efficacious to salvation. We must be careful when we are in a place of leadership; it is a great temptation for us to presume we know more than we actually do simply because of what we have seen. This should not deter us from being honest and straightforward in our exhortations, but it should cause us to refrain from being overly dogmatic about what we have observed. Only God can judge the heart. This brings us to the second possible temptation a leader will encounter when applying this. As discussed above, it is easy to over-emphasize a passage such as this. However, it is also easy to ignore a passage that seems to be so strong in its teaching. We must be faithful to our brothers not to shy away when they become entrapped in some type of false teaching that does not accord with the teaching of the Bible. It is relatively easy to tell people to love one another in our exhortations. It is another thing altogether to tell them they are in danger of going to hell. We must not be afraid to proclaim the whole counsel of God as is found in His Word.

Third, it is important to understand how we as interpreters approach the Biblical text when we are confronted with an apparent problem. The text must always be our authority, not our theology nor our personal bias which may be drawn from past experience. When approaching a problem, it is very easy to succumb to the first inclination that intrigues the mind and emotions. However, we should be ready to give up our position if it is shown by the Word of God to be faulty. Biblical interpreters must continually be on guard against themselves. As James said himself, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust."

Finally, as students of the Bible, we must continually recognize that encounters such as these are not exercises in futility, but rather are a blessing to our soul as we grow in Christian maturity and become more familiar with the Word of God. We must continually approach the Bible

as our main sustenance, our “daily bread.” We can only know our God as well as we study and learn about Him in the Self-revelation of his Word.

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