

# James 2:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

## Analysis

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**But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?** James addresses the foolish man (*anthrōpe kene*, ἄνθρωπε κενέ), asking if he wants to know that faith without works is barren (*argos*, ἀργός). The adjective means idle or useless. Empty claims need rebuke; James confronts complacency head-on.

Reformed theology values pastoral admonition: mere assent without obedience is vanity. James's sharp tone signals the danger of lifeless faith.

## Historical Context

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Antinomian tendencies threatened early churches, prompting strong apostolic correction (cf. Jude 4). James, shepherding diaspora believers, uses wisdom literature's bluntness to awaken sleepers. Paul's questions in Romans 6 mirror this rhetorical style.

## Related Passages

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**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

## Study Questions

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1. Where do you need a wake-up call regarding idle faith?
2. Who has permission to confront you about hypocrisy?
3. How will you respond to James's rebuke with repentance?

## Interlinear Text

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Θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι ὁ ἄνθρωπε κενέ ὅτι ἡ πίστις  
wilt But thou know O man vain that G3588 faith  
G2309 G1161 G1097 G5599 G444 G2756 G3754 G4102

χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων νεκρά ἐστιν  
without G3588 works dead is  
G5565 G2041 G3498 G2076

## Additional Cross-References

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**Proverbs 12:11** (Parallel theme): He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding.

**James 2:17** (Faith): Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

**James 2:26** (Faith): For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

**Romans 1:21** (Parallel theme): Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.