

 **THE ALLIANCE**  
*Living the Call together...*

**It was two days before Christmas in 2001. My school was having its annual Christmas banquet, and I was all dressed up for the occasion. My best friend and I walked together to the only five-star hotel in Cambodia and entered the ballroom. Everything looked beautiful. The lighting was dim, and wonderfully crafted ice sculptures bordered the dance floor.**

The student council president directed us to our tables, and we began to eat soon afterward. The conversation drifted from regular, innocent table talk to more questionable topics.

I noticed that some of my classmates had started to drift off one by one but not to the dance floor. After a short while, I saw my best friend leave as well, going out the side exit to the garden. What were they doing?

I followed my friend outside and noticed a slight glow behind some of the bushes. Indistinct laughter was coming from that direction. I walked over to see my friends smoking. *What to do? I asked myself. Why not just join in?*

They offered, and I hesitated and looked away. In the back of my mind, I remembered hearing in church that we should “live for Christ.” How could I smoke a cigarette? Would it really make Christ joyful?

I turned back to my classmates. “This isn’t right,” I said. “Put it all away. We shouldn’t even be here.” They stared blankly at me. But in the end, much to my surprise, they put the cigarettes away. I felt fulfilled.

### **Living “Free”**

As Christians, we often get the idea that we have the perfect lives. We think that Jesus’ death and Resurrection will nullify whatever sins we may commit. They won’t hinder us, and we’ll have no eternal consequences. So we keep on sinning, and God keeps on forgiving. We think we don’t need to stop the sins in our lives because God won’t write them down in His “sin journal.”

Is this right? Is this the message Jesus came to give to the world? In James 2:14–17 it says, “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

People may ask, “The Bible teaches that it’s not by works but by faith that you receive salvation, does it not?” Before reaching any sort of conclusion, we need to go back to the essence of Christianity.

### **Dead Faith?**

When beginning the new life as Christians, we must receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. It doesn’t matter how this happens. It may be as simple as a prayer at a bedside or as dramatic as the apostle Paul’s conversion when Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light.

When we accept Jesus, we put our faith in Him to save us from eternal separation from God—what’s better known as hell. We ask God to take control. We want to live our lives in pursuit of Him. He becomes the core of our being. The trouble comes when James says, “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

In his commentary on the Bible, Matthew Henry writes, “No doubt, true faith alone, whereby men have part in Christ’s righteousness, atonement, and grace, saves their souls; but it produces holy fruits, and is shown to be real by its effect on their works.” Notice that Henry reminds us that true faith produces “fruit” in our lives—actions that demonstrate our love for Christ. When Christ becomes the driving force behind our lives, it affects who we are. We’ve left our old lives behind, living new lives blessed by the Holy Spirit.

If we truly have authentic faith, our actions change. Everything we do ties in with the life we’ve begun with Christ; we let Him influence our every action. We begin to understand that everything we do is for the glory of Jesus. So can we have faith without deeds? Can we have

faith in Christ without actually living the Christian life the way Christ called us to? The answer is no because God knows our hearts.

### **For Him**

You see, my faith hasn’t always been strong. I can remember times when I wouldn’t stand up to people when they talked of inappropriate things. I drifted through life, influenced by anything and everything that passed my way. I thought I could live the Christian life in church and that Jesus would forgive me for all the times I didn’t live for Him.

At the Christmas banquet when I saw my friends smoking, I could have kept on living the life I’d lived all along. I could have had all the “fun” in the world by smoking, but what for? Jesus’ power overwhelmed me. I knew the truth. I knew what I had to do. I needed to live the Christian life.

We can ask Jesus to enter our lives, but until we start living the Christian life, our faith amounts to nothing. Jesus comes into our lives so we can be connected with God, not separated. Therefore, our works need to show Jesus’ power.

James reminds us that our faith is dead without a life that proves we have Christ within us. Jesus changes lives. I have learned that I need to live *for* Christ, not just *with* Christ. He remains the same. It’s we who need to change. Are you choosing every day to live for Christ or simply with Christ? **@**



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