

JAMES 2:14-26
Faith and Works pt 2
Week 12

Illustration: (all break down somewhere)

Imagine you're at lunch with someone and as you go to the restroom the bill comes and the other person pays it. You come back and he/she says, "The Bill is paid. You are free to go and have no obligation."

You could respond by saying, "Thank you. I really appreciate that." That is Paul's view of faith and justification. It is a work done by another for you that you receive by faith trusting that all is paid for.

OR

You could say, "Really? Prove it. Show me the evidence of what you have done. Show me the receipt.. i.e. verify or vindicate your claim" That is the James approach to the issue of faith and works – your works are the 'receipt' or verification of what is claimed, "we are free to go."

Not a perfect example, but I hope it will give you a sense of what is going on here.

Paul deals with justification by faith alone in terms of our legal standing before God. James deals with justification by works (2:24) in terms of evidence or proof of our faith before men. i.e. "You show me your faith without works and I'll show you my faith by my works."

When James says that one is justified by what one does, not by faith alone, he means by "justified" "proved genuine; vindicated from the suspicion of being a hypocrite and a fraud."

Paul denounces the idea of salvation by dead works; James rejects salvation by dead faith. (Packer)

Paul denies works as a basis for justification;

James insists that works are an evidence of justification.

Our understanding of this issue doesn't indicate whether one is a good Christian or a bad Christian. It indicates whether or not one is qualified to be a demon. So with that, let's dig in.

14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

18 But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. (Deut 6:4) You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac (Gen 22) his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:2) and he was called the friend of God.

24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot (Josh 2) also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

"DOING becomes instinctive when hearts are gripped by DONE" –

Tullian Tchividjian

What James and Paul show in different ways is that Faith and works can be distinguished but not separated.

Works are not to be identified as; faith' itself. Works are the fruit of faith, not the essence of faith. Faith is the empty hand that takes hold of Christ and His perfect obedience.

Paul deals with– faith v no faith

James deals with – dead faith v living faith - profession/empty confession/mental assent vs life changing trust.

JAMES ILLUSTRATES GOOD WORKS vs Dead Faith

v. 14 -17 dead faith is seen in EMPTY COMPASSION. Here he gives an illustration of what real faith would look like compared to a dead faith.

The audience is in a context of need in the church, yet the one “says” – go in peace, be warm – concern with no action. **THAT IS NOT REAL CONCERN.**

Genuine compassion acts in ways to meet the need. This claim to care is useless.

“Saving faith results in a distinctive life. A thing as potent as the new birth, if it has taken place, cannot be hidden; it cannot fail to make its presence felt. To have the life of God in us and to remain unchanged is unthinkable.” Alec Motyer

The problem that James is addressing isn't “this person lacks works.” The person lacks that which gives rise to works – faith. The problem is that this person lacks a living faith.. (C.J.Mahaney)

“James is not arguing that works must be added to faith. His point is that genuine biblical faith will inevitably be characterized by works.” Doug Moo

V 18-19 – EMPTY CONFESSION. Less compelling than demon faith. At least the demons shudder.

James is addressing a misconception about the nature of faith – a mere intellectual assent to an idea- (notitia plus assensus)

v. 19. Such pure doctrinal faith simply qualifies one to be a demon.

Matt 8:28 When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. *They were* so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way. 29 And they cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” John 7:6ff

James does the ‘go big or go home’ approach and compares the dead faith of a sound profession to demons. You are qualified to be a demon.

If this were a boxing match James might be penalized for a low blow. I dare say he gets their attention. Perhaps he learned this from his older brother, Jesus, who called out Peter by saying, “Get thee behind me Satan.”

For James, the demons illustrate the poverty of a mere intellectual assent. He could have used a less startling comparison but he wants to show that this is serious business.

An ‘orthodox’ profession is not saving faith if it is not accompanied by a change life. Even though the demons shudder their faith is useless. As is faith without works.

2. THE TRAJECTORY OF GOOD WORKS

Not a monastic personal piety view of good works.

James describes works of public service. V 15-16 Works are outwardly directed.

James doesn't focus on private inward spirituality.

James 1:27 (widows, orphans) similar outward focus of spiritual life – takes us into the messy lives of others.

Thinking less of self and more of others is a way to grow spiritually.

This does not negate the importance of private spiritual formation – memorization and meditation.

I have repeated that theme many times in the past 7 years, and it should not be ignored.

Our natural tendency is to focus on ourselves. We don't have to be taught that. It just happens.

James shows us that a full-orbed maturity has an outward face as well.

Even as Christians we can focus on what we do rather than focusing on Christ's life, His obedience for us.

Christianity is not about our self-improvement. If it were, we'd all be in deep weeds.

When it becomes more about "me and my holiness" instead of Christ and His holiness, I don't grow.

We only "get better" when we stop fixating on getting better.

Our private prayer life indicates if we are internally focused or not.

Our greatest need is to focus more on Christ than on ourselves.

John Owen – Every gaze you take of yourself, take 10 of Jesus."

Paul shows this in Eph 3: prayer. When we stand in the middle of God's love, it will spill out toward others.

We glorify God through humble reliance on Him and by enjoying him.

THE FOUNDATION OF GOOD WORKS- Faith

Gen 22 sacrifice of Isaac

Josh 2 – Rahab and spies

In each case there was a profession of faith prior to the exploit of faith. It was faith that propelled their good works.

Once you are free from having to do anything, because of the all-sufficient work of Christ, you are free to do everything.

What are you going to do now that you don't have to do anything?

There is nothing that we add to the work of Christ.

A case of pure 100 proof grace makes us diligent in good works – Titus 2

Titus 2:

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Good works flow naturally from a heart that is gripped by the free love of God.

Failure to do good works happens not when we think too much of grace, but when we think too little of grace.

The fear of the Roman Church during the Reformation was that if you tell people that salvation is free by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then it would open a floodgate of iniquity.

Chalmers

Salvation by grace, salvation by free grace, salvation not by works but according to the mercy of God is indispensable...to...godliness. Retain a single shred or fragment of legality with the Gospel...and you take away the power of the Gospel to melt and conciliate. For this purpose, the freer it is, the better it is. That very peculiarity which so many dread as the germ of Antinomianism [lawlessness], is, in fact, the germ of a new spirit, and a new inclination against it

“The more we know we are accepted, the more successfully we begin to grow. Love is a far better stimulus than threat or pressure.” Brennan Manning

James moves on to ILLUSTRATE HIS POINT...

v. 21-25 – Two illustrations – Abraham and Rahab – faith displayed by genuine obedience.

Gen 22 obedience of sacrifice – faith and works go together. The obedience of Gen 22 is founded on the faith of Gen 15.

Paul Rom 4, Gal 3 uses Abraham in Genesis 15 as example of justification by faith

James uses Gen 22 to show how real faith issues into obedience. (sacrifice of Isaac)

v. 24 easy to misunderstand if there is no context- the reference is to dead faith of one who “says he has faith”, but has no works.

v. 25 – A surprising example – Rahab. James could have chosen many other examples but went with this Canaanite prostitute. One might call her “The Happy Hooker.”

Saving faith can be found in a patriarch or a prostitute. Neither is sinless, but both demonstrate the reality of genuine faith which is displayed through works of obedience.

Josh 2 is where we hear her profession of faith that led to the obedience of faith. She believed and acted, even risking her life. Why?? She had genuine faith.

Genuine faith is an active faith

“He designedly put together two persons so different in their character, in order more clearly to show that no one, whatever may have been his or her condition, nation, or class in society, has ever been counted righteous without good works.” John Calvin

v. 26 premise repeated – faith without works is dead.

APPLICATION:

Likely that you know someone who has made a profession but there doesn't seem to be any real change of life, affections, or priorities.

“It may be that a passionate desire to make the gospel attractive and non-offensive and the church user friendly and influential has corrupted our fidelity to biblical truth and ethical methodology. The theology so popular in many of today's churches differs significantly from historic Christian teaching. The new theological wrinkle offers quick and permanent assurance of salvation in response to an easily professed belief while at the same time allowing the convert to live indefinitely with contempt for Christ's teaching. Such flaccidity thereby permits the professing Christian to remain in a lifestyle indistinguishable from that of the unregenerate yet confident in eternal salvation.” James Boice

What is all too common in our world today was an issue with the audience of this letter from James. There is nothing new under the sun.

Is there someone with whom you need to have a difficult but important conversation? Perhaps you may need to have that conversation with yourself.

9 Marks – How do I lovingly confront someone who claims to be converted but lives like a non-Christian
<https://www.9marks.org/answer/how-do-i-lovingly-confront-someone-who-claims-be-converted-who-lives-non-christian/>

I know a well-known pastor who had to have such a conversation with a college age son many years ago. The response wasn't immediate but a bit later the son did come to genuine faith.

-Pray for yourself and the other person.

-Speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

-Point them to the Scriptures..

-Question them gently.

-Remind them of their profession of faith and baptism. Remind them of the gospel.

-Urge them to consider eternity. Remind them that their eternal joy or condemnation is at stake (Ps. 49; Matt. 25:31-46).

We need to care enough about them to have this conversation because there are eternal implications. Speak humbly and gently having experienced the gentleness of Christ yourself.

Don't speak from a place of moral superiority, although you shouldn't be surprised if that charge is leveled at you. These are not easy conversations. Remember this, a person's first response is rarely his or her last response.

"I pray the Lord to give you a gentle and loving spirit towards all men, and a practical conviction that grace alone has made you to differ. It is easy to acknowledge this in words, but it is a great thing to act suitably to such an acknowledgement." John Newton

Think about that, Amen

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