

Putting Our Faith to Work James 2:14-26

James 2:14-26 Introduction

- We all know the type. "Sure I'm a Christian," they say.
- And we look at their lives thinking, "*Oh Really? I never would have guessed.*"
- James knew the type also - and he attacks them in this passage.
- He gives us all reminder that:
- Our good works are the only part of our faith that anyone will ever see.

A truly biblical faith requires right belief accompanied by radical obedience.

James 2:14-26 Outline

- Saving faith produces actions. 2:14
- Let your faith be more than words. 2:15-17
- And more than words plus emotion. 2:18-20
- The Example of Abraham. 2:21-24
- The Example of Rahab the Harlot. 2:25-26

Saving faith produces actions. 2:14

- NKJV "Can faith save him?" (As in KJV)
- ESV "Can that faith save him?"
- NASB "Can that faith save him?"
- YLT "is that faith able to save him?"
- NIV "Can such faith save them?"
- HCSB "Can his faith save him?"
- NLT "Can that kind of faith save anyone?"

Let your faith be more than words. 2:15-17

- James is still working off of his example of the rich and the poor brothers in 2:1-13.
- 2:16 The NLT is expressive here:
 - "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"
- What does it profit? = "What good is that?"
- Do we need any more reason than this to support Project Love, our food and clothing ministries?
- 2:17 dead = *nekros* = dead.
- There is no other good way to translate this.
- A living faith in the Living God, will produce a life full of good works, behavior consistent with God's character.
- A dead faith will produce, well, stupidity like the example that James give here.
- We might call this faith *Dead Orthodoxy*.
 - "*Beware of a mere intellectual faith. No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same ... Dead faith is not saving faith. Dead faith is counterfeit faith and lulls the person into a false confidence of eternal life.*" Warren Wiersbe, in *Be Mature*

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And more than words plus emotion. 2:18-20

- 2:18a Again, here is the NLT:
 - “Now someone may argue, ‘Some people have faith; others have good deeds.’”
- That might be a good way to express what James is saying.
- Some might like to separate faith and good deeds, as if the two can live separately and each be real – in isolation from one another.

- 2:18b The answer from James is clear.
- Our works are the only way that anyone can tell whether our faith is genuine.
- Our works, good or bad, are the natural result of the life that we possess.
- Without good works a person gives no evidence that he or she has eternal life.

- 2:19 Demons can honestly agree with the most perfectly formed doctrinal statement of the most authentically biblical church.
- And when they think of God they “tremble” or “shudder with fear.”
- This word appears nowhere else in the NT, but when used outside the NT, it refers to “uncontainable, uncontrollable, violent shaking from extreme fear.” (Blomberg & Kamell)

- Some people have more to offer than words as evidence of their faith.
- They have faith plus some very convincing emotional experiences.
- They may literally be overcome with emotion during religious ceremonies or church services, at Christian concerts or other events.
- Without the fruit of good works, their faith is every bit as good as a demon’s.

- Albert Barnes is frighteningly plain on this point:
 - *“If they (i.e., demons) might hold such faith, and still remain in perdition, men might hold it, and go to perdition.*
 - *A man should not infer, therefore, because he has faith, even that faith in God which will fill him with alarm, that therefore he is safe. He must have a faith which will produce another effect altogether—that which will lead to a holy life.”*

- 2:20 Foolish = empty, hollow, fruitless, of that in which there is nothing of truth or reality, false, fallacious, empty, hollow. (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*)
- It speaks of intellectual error that is grounded in moral emptiness.
- Dead in this verse is not the same word we saw in 2:17. Here it is more like “useless.”
 - *“James has introduced us to two kinds of faith that can never save the sinner: dead faith (the intellect alone), and demonic faith (the intellect and the emotions). He closes this section by describing the only kind of faith that can save the sinner—dynamic faith.”*
Warren Wiersbe, in *Be Mature*

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Two Very Different Examples

1. The first is Abraham, the venerable father of the faithful, the great patriarch of the people of God.
 2. The second is Rahab, a young prostitute that was willing to risk her life to help two Israelite spies.
- By illustrating his point with two people who are so very different, James doesn't allow any of us to claim to be an exception.

The Example of Abraham. 2:21-24

- When Abraham was still childless, he received a promise from God that he would have a great many descendants.
- He trusted that God would bring this to pass.
- James quotes Genesis 15:6, where Abraham is counted as righteous because of his faith.
- Isaac was born some 25 years later.

- Then, later still, in Genesis 22, God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, the son of the promise, on an altar.
- We read of Abraham's obedient response in Genesis 22:3-5.
- Abraham's words and actions both expressed resolute trust in God.
- 2:22 His actions "made his faith perfect," meaning they "brought his faith to maturity."
 - *"By his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham proved the faith that he had in God's promises. Now it wasn't the act of offering Isaac that caused God to account Abraham righteous. He was accounted righteous by his faith alone, but his faith was then acted out in his offering of Isaac. No man will ever be moved to action without faith. But no man's faith is genuine unless it moves him to action."*

Chuck Smith, in The Word for Today Bible

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The example of Rahab the Harlot. 2:25-26

- Rahab was a Canaanite "harlot" or prostitute.
- Prostitutes were the priestesses in the traditional Canaanite fertility cult – a form of idolatry normal in Jericho.
- Rahab hid the spies sent by Joshua to scope out the city – and helped them to escape from the king's messengers.
- You can read about her in Joshua 2.

- Rahab concluded that Israel's God was real.
- No doubt she already knew that her sex-based religion was not, so –
- She rejected her fertility gods and defied the king of Jericho in order to join herself to the people and God of Israel.
- She later married a Jew named Salmon, who was the father of Boaz, etc.,
- Jesus is her great (x 28) grandson. (Matthew 1).

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Do Paul and James disagree?

- Many of us have heard this question – or maybe have asked it ourselves.
 - See for example Galatians 2:15-16.
 - There is also Ephesians 2:8-9.
- The disagreement is really only on the surface.
- In fact, they are in complete agreement.
- That's right, they don't disagree one bit.
- The beginning of our answer is found when we continue to Ephesians 2:10.
- Augustine (354 – 430 A.D.) resolved the apparent tension between James and Paul regarding faith and works as follows:
 - *“Paul said that a man is justified through faith without the works of the law, but not without those works of which James speaks.”*
- Or this from John Wesley:
 - *“And yet there is no contradiction ... because, They do not speak of the same faith: St. Paul speaking of living faith; St. James here, of dead faith. They do not speak of the same works: St. Paul speaking of works antecedent [prior] to faith; St. James, of works subsequent to it [that is, after faith].”*
- To Paul the question was:
 - “How is a person to be saved?” and the answer, “By faith, not by the works of the law.”
- To James the question was:
 - “What if someone says they have faith, but their life give zero evidence?” and the answer, “Then that is not saving faith.”
- To see a contradiction is to misunderstand one, the other, or both.
- Or, think of it like this:
 - Paul denies the *effectiveness* of works without conversion.
 - James denies the *genuineness* of conversion without works.
- The Anglican Church has a statement of faith it calls the *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*.
 - Article 11 reads: “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith.”
 - Article 12 reads: “Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith ... are ... pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith.”
- If you still need convincing, go back and read Paul's letter to Titus, where we find the following scathing critique:
 - *“[Certain people] profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” (Titus 1:16)*
- Sounds a bit like James here, doesn't he?
- You can also go back and read Acts 15. There Peter, Paul, Barnabas and James discuss this very issue. As it happens they are all come to a complete and happy agreement.

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The Necessity of Good Works

- Faith which is purely doctrinal – nothing but abstract agreement with a certain set of truths, is not worth the paper the doctrinal statement is printed on.
- Neither is faith with right doctrine accompanied only by emotion. Even demons can claim that kind of “faith.”

- In times past, many Christians were very concerned about what they called “holiness”
- They would react against anything new that would get the world’s approval.
- It led to a lot of needless, not exactly biblical, and usually unproductive rules.
- And people got tired of the legalism.

- So we no longer have *that* problem, but we may have gone too far in the other direction.
- We too often fail to see any danger at all in the trends and the tendencies of the world – even those trends that are quite unbiblical.
- Thus, the rejection of a wrong-headed legalism has also caused us to forget that there is a form of separation from sin and the world that is both valid and necessary.

- “If everyone else does it and gets away with it, why shouldn’t the Christian?”
- We have broken our moral compass, or perhaps lost it, and don’t even seem to care.
- Our faith has been reduced to mere slogans like, “a personal relationship with Christ,” which can mean a lot of things to a lot of people.
- And the only difference between the church and the world is that we get angrier more often.

- We love the fact that Jesus offers genuine pardon from sin.
- We are indifferent to the fact that He also offers resurrection power to overcome sin.
- And so, we are easily attracted to sin.
- After all, any danger of judgment has already been removed by Christ.

- As a result, we are content with a form of Christianity that James, Paul and every other NT author would thoroughly reject.
- And, if James offers us any insight at all, we may be severely mistaken about where we stand with God at this moment.

- We need to rediscover and live by a positive Christian standard that, as Paul demanded, is “rich in good works.” (1 Timothy 6:18)
- This is not reacting against world around us by embracing legalism.
- It is responding obediently to the Word of God and once again becoming lights in an obviously Christ-starved world.

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