

Goodness: A Faith that Works

James – God's Work in Us and through Us

Hillsboro Presbyterian Church

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James 2:14-26 may be the most controversial passage in James. The New Testament teaches that we are saved by faith alone. James says, "It is faith and works." Paul and James seem to disagree ...but they are talking about different things. Paul was fighting the problem of legalism -- the problem of "I've got to keep all the Jewish laws and regulations to be a Christian." James is not fighting legalism but laxity -- those that say "It doesn't matter what you do as long as you believe." Paul focuses on the root of salvation -- what happens to me internally. James focuses on the fruit of salvation -- what happens on the outside. Paul is talking about, "How to know you're a Christian." James is talking about, "How to show you're a Christian." Paul is talking about how to become a believer. James is talking about how to behave like a believer.

Ephesians 2:8-10 sums up Paul's message **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, for a life of good works that God has already prepared for us to do."** 3 prepositions - "by grace", "through faith", "for good works". Paul stresses you must have all three...in order...the first leads to the second which leads to the third. James stresses you must have all 3...the third shows the second which shows the first. How do I show I am a believer? 5 principles in James 2:14-26...

FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU SAY * 2:14 **"What good is it my brother if a man claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such 'faith' save him?"**

It does not say he actually has faith, he just claims to have it. He talks about it. He knows all the right phrases. George Gallup says that 50 million Americans say "I am born again," but you don't see anything in their lifestyle that would indicate they are. We tend to label people as Christians if they make the slightest sound of being a believer. James says it is more than just talk that is involved in real faith. Jesus said, "Not everybody who says to me 'Lord, Lord' is going to enter into the kingdom of heaven." Talk is cheap. Remember when Larry Flint, the publisher of Hustler magazine, said he was born again? But you never saw any change in his life. He showed he had a phony faith. What good is it? No good. Can such 'faith' save him? Not according to Jesus. And not according to James. Real faith is more than empty words.

FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU FEEL * 2:15-16 **"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him 'Go, I wish you well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"**

In Peanuts cartoon, Charlie Brown and Linus are bundled up inside while Snoopy is outside shivering in front of an empty dog bowl. Charlie and Linus are discussing how sad it is that Snoopy is hungry and cold. "We ought to do something about it." They walk outside and say, "Be of good cheer, Snoopy." Do you know where Charles Schultz got that idea? From this verse. What good is it if you see someone in need and you say, "I feel for you!" James is saying, "It's more than just words. It's more than just feelings." Real faith is more than just sympathy and feeling and emotion. You do something about it. You act on it. Real faith is practical, it takes the initiative, it gets involved with people. James is talking about Christians here. When you become a part of God's family you have some family responsibilities. They will know we are Christians by our _____. James is saying that if your faith doesn't lead you to share with others then what good is it.

v. 17 **"In the same way, faith by itself if it's not accompanied by actions is dead."** If I don't feel like helping other Christians, I don't have a sick faith, I have a dead faith.

FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU THINK * 2:18 **"Someone will say 'You have faith, I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do."**

For some people, faith is an intellectual trip -- a matter to be studied, debated, talked over and discussed. James imagines this intellectual objector who says, "You're into faith, I'm into works. To each his own. Stimulate me mentally but don't ask me to make any commitment." James says real faith is visible. If you claim to be a Christian, people will be able to see it. Sadly, we have a lot of Lady Clairol Christians -- only God knows for sure. Since faith is odorless, weightless, and invisible - anybody can claim to have it. James says, "Show me." "Faith is like calories. You can't see them but you can see the results." You can't see faith but you can see the results by looking at the lifestyle. A children's song goes: "If you're saved and you know it, then your life will surely show it." That's what James is saying. Show me. If you grab onto a 220 volt wire you're going to know it. I don't see how somebody as big as God can enter your life and it not change you. If God doesn't change you there's a question whether God is really in your life. Jimmy Carter said that "one of the things that was a turning point in his life when somebody asked him the question, 'If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'" Good question. Faith produces change.

FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU BELIEVE * 2:19 **"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that -- and shudder!"**

Many people have strong beliefs in God, the Bible, and Christ. They can talk about doctrines and quote bible verses. James says, "big deal!" Just saying "I believe in God" is not enough to get you to heaven. Even the devil believes in God. Why do demons shudder? Because they understand the majesty and awesomeness of God. They believe in God and they tremble. The word "believe" means "to trust in, to cling to, to rely on, to commit yourself completely." Real faith is not just saying "I believe". There is much "believism" in America. There is a high degree of profession but and low level of practice...James would call that a phony faith.

FAITH IS SOMETHING YOU DO * 2:20 **"Do you want evidence faith without works is useless?"**

James gives two illustrations that faith is what you do. Abraham and Rahab -- exact opposites. Man/woman; Jewish/Gentile; Patriarch/prostitute; Somebody/nobody; Major character in the Bible/ minor character. The contrast says "it doesn't matter who you are as long as you've got faith in action. Their actions showed their trust in God. Our faith is not determined by what we do, it is demonstrated by what we do. Our behavior shows what we really believe.

2 Corinthians 13:5 says **"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."** In light of what James says, ask: "Am I really a Christian? What changes can I point to in my life? Is my lifestyle any different from unbelievers?" James is not saying you work your way to heaven...that works deliver salvation, James is saying they demonstrate salvation. Saved by grace, through faith to do exactly what God made you to do. The Christian faith works because faith in Christ enables God to work in us. To know Christ is to show Christ.