

Faith in Action

The Interplay of Faith & Works

Discovering Practical Christianity (James) Series – Part 4

Sept 10/11

James 2:14-26

Introduction

- **Curt's Message on Hearing and Doing, Active Faith.** We are going to build on that again this weekend.
- **Not quite who we think we are:** we may not be quite who we think we are. **The option of doing something doesn't make it an identity.**
 - **If I say that I am a baker,** but I do not bake consistently, am I?
 - **If I say that I am a runner,** but I do not run, am I a runner or am I someone that occasionally runs?
 - **If I say that I am a fireman,** but I do not put out fires, am I not simply someone in a costume?
 - **If I say that I am a Christian,** but I do not love consistently and actively, am I truly a 'little Christ', following in the steps of Jesus? Or am I fooling myself?
- **Salvation and Discipleship hinge on what's called FAITH**
 - **Faith has 3 main components:**
 - **Belief** – agreeing with a certain reality
 - **Trust In** – leaning upon that reality and acting as if it's so.
 - **Loyalty** – a commitment to that reality.
 - **When we say we have faith in Jesus Christ and call ourselves Christians, it's not simply saying that we believe that Jesus was the Son of God.** We are not Christians simply because we agree with a set of facts. It involves much more than that.
 - **To be a Christian involves:**
 - **Believing** that Jesus Christ is who He said He is, the Son of God and Savior of the world, the One who died for our sins and our King. So, yes, there are a set of facts that develop a reality that we agree to be true and right, despite what others may say or our circumstances challenging that. Believing that heavenly reality is more real than our earthly reality.
 - **Trust** in Jesus to actually do what He said He did. Trusting that His perfect life did actually deal with our sins and make us right with God. Trust by leaning into Him for strength, putting His priorities first believing that He is most important. It means not seeking to save ourselves. It's either Jesus saving or nothing.
 - **Loyalty** to live out what God expects of us as His creation and His children. It's agreeing to His priorities and agenda. It's a firm resolution and decision to live according to what He wants and putting our selfish desires behind us. It's faithfully pursuing His best even when we don't want to. It's choosing to love and worship no other god of our own making.

- **It should be obvious that we are Christians** – Do people know that about you? Can they tell without asking? Do they suspect that something is different about you? If they decided they wanted to know more about God are you a viable option for them to ask?
- **Let’s talk about Christian stuff you do** – for a moment we are going to put away your belief system and your theology. What do you do that is specifically and uniquely Christian in nature?
 - Do you serve people?
 - Do you support the work of God financially?
 - Do you worship and praise His Name?
 - Do you help the less fortunate?
 - Do you alter your day for His purposes?
 - Do you read and study His Word to know Him more?
 - Do you pray intentionally?
 - I’ll give you a moment to jot down or just think of ACTIONS that you could list, that you’ve done this last week or so, primarily because you are a Christian.

True FAITH Demands Real ACTION

- **James’s Main Points in our Passage**
 1. **Be Who You Are** - Demanding that the church do what they say they are going to do and be who they say they are: Christians.
 2. **Don’t Excuse Your Behavior** – To pull away their religious, self-justification walls they’ve built to hide behind and excuse their behavior.
 - **The Hinge point** – the behavior that James is attacking has **one primary premise**: that **we can’t just think nice things and call ourselves Christians without having to do anything**. That’s not a thing and he exposes it.

Lesson

- **Empty Words**
 - **A Faith Without Evidence Isn’t Real**
 - **James 2:14-19** - *“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save¹ him?² ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed³ and lacking in daily food⁴, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed*

¹ “The aorist signifies “achieve salvation for him,” not merely “promote it.” NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

² “The Greek interrogative expects the answer “no” to the question: “Is faith enough to save him?”” NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

³ “Literally “naked” (nudus), e.g., Gen. 2:25; 3:7, the Greek word usually indicates a lack of clothing (see Job 22:6; Isa. 20:2, 3; 58:7; 2 Macc. 11:12), sometimes a total lack (Mark 14:52), but other times “without an outer garment” (John 21:7; see Matt. 25:36).” NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

⁴ “The meaning of daily, only here in the NT, not in the LXX, and occasionally in Classical Greek,¹⁵⁵ is difficult to determine, depending on whether it is taken as “that which is on day,” or “that which has day upon it.” Instead of daily food, we could translate “the day’s supply of food.”” NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

and filled⁵,⁶ without giving them the things needed for the body⁷, what good is that?¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.⁸¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”

- **What good is it to say we have faith if there’s no evidence of activity? – it’s not just misleading to others it may be misleading to the one who is saying it.** Not only is it not good, but it’s also wrong and manipulative.
 - **Necessary evidence** – True faith MUST produce good works, there’s no other way.
- **Can such a faith, one absent from outworking evidence, be a saving faith? – No, it cannot.** By the biblical definition of faith, outworking is necessary.
 - **What saving faith is and how we enter into it** – Saving faith is what we talked about at the beginning of the message. It’s believing, trusting and living loyally in alignment with. In other words, it’s a change of heart and a change of lifestyle. We enter into it when we recognize our lack and our need for God (God has to reveal that, we wouldn’t see it on our own). Then we recognize that He’s done something about our condition and offered a solution and salvation. We need to understand that and agree to that. The arrangement is that we would surrender and commit our life to Him so that He can work it out on our behalf. We then live FOR Him moving forward to the best of our ability, learning along the way that He has done more than we ever imagined and that most of our new life is simply walking into our new identity and reality. This allows us to come alive more and more and discern God’s purposes for us and the meaning of our existence.
- **James’ Example 1: A poor Christian is in LEGIT need (lacking clothes and food) and you only respond with empty words of well wishing. Have you done anything good? No. You think you may have.** You said something nice, but you didn’t respond to the actual need. You brushed it off and accomplished nothing but disappointment.
 - **Let’s talk about justification with words. It’s a problem.** When we reply to someone with words, we are promising something, but if it’s not backed up with the promised action it’s a lie. The most famous one that is a pet peeve of mine is, ‘I’ll pray for you.’ It stops the conversation, and the people feel good about it. But if there is no prayer that follows it, then it’s an empty promise. **It’s not just manipulative but it’s dangerous to our faith.** We set a

⁵ “To eat well is a vulgarism, literally “gorge oneself,” like a ravenous beast, especially of cattle, as in early Greek...” NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

⁶ “Keep warm and eat well”—the form of the original is important: imperative, not indicative (Plumptre), passive not middle,¹⁶⁵ present rather than aorist. This failure of Christian love was not accidental, but sustained and deliberate.” NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

⁷ “The rabbis advised those unable to provide relief at least to speak words of comfort: “My soul goes out to you because I have nothing to give you.” Apparently this “Christian” seems to be well able to provide relief: his ability is not in question, only his faith.” NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

⁸ “One may put it like this (by way of challenge that the challenger knows cannot be met): “You claim to have faith: I have works. I can prove my faith by my works. But I defy you to prove to me the existence of your faith without works: for, of course, you cannot do it.” NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

cultural tone by saying that a lot, so it seems that there is a lot of prayer happening, but it's not. And if we think there's a lot of prayer, but there's not a lot of answers or miracles, we think that God has failed us, when in fact He may not have been spoken to at all.

- **Let's Talk About Different Behavior Toward Christians** – one thing that's interesting about how the Bible talks about how we treat people is that it makes a distinction, especially in the New Testament epistles, between how we should behave toward Christians vs. non-Christians. On some things, like forgiveness and love, we ought to be fully engaged for both groups, but when it comes to certain behaviors, like certain intentional care elements, there's a higher standard to respond to the needs of believers vs. non-believers. Why is this? I believe (and I could be wrong) that it's founded on the concept that the early Christian Church were the outcasts. Society had ways of caring for one another, but the Church was kind of on its own. Also, it was being treated like a family and **family is treated differently than neighbors**. There's no question that we are supposed to care like the Good Samaritan for our neighbor and love our enemies, but the NT leaders highlight that 'if one doesn't care for his own relatives' he's worse than an unbeliever. In other words, they care for each other, why don't we? **The point is not to diminish our care for the unsaved world, but to increase the care for fellow believers.** At the end of the day it's a demand to leave behind selfishness.
- **Faith Without Works is Dead** – **it's non-effective.** It's not present. It's not real. It's fruitless.
 - **Examine Yourself** – it's tempting to look at other people when we hear a challenge, but **the first person we ought to put through a filter is ourselves** and then we can look around us to see how it should be properly applied to others. Paul the Apostle talks about examining ourselves to see whether we are of the faith. It means put some scrutiny to the evidence of our faith. Do we have proof from our lifestyles that we are believers in Jesus Christ? Has He truly done a work in us and in our identity?
 - **Some May Defend Themselves: I'm a Faith person and you are a Works Person⁹, don't judge me** – Yah, so that's not a thing. It's a common mindset for religious people to fall into. It's a way of staying in our comfort zones. We say, hey there are people who do Christian stuff outwardly and there's secret internal, personal Christians like me. Nope. **There's Jesus Christianity and there's not.** There are saved people who are barely saved and no good to this world, if that's what you mean, but don't call yourself a 'little Christ mimic' (the definition of Christian) if you don't represent Jesus accurately.

⁹ The commentaries are extremely confused by verse 18 because it's totally wrong in Greek. It's like James messed up on how he wrote it or a copyist copied it wrong. It says the polar opposite (I have WORKS, you have FAITH), when the argument is that they are claiming to have only faith and others have works. So, we are going to go with the main thrust of the whole argument and not get into the weeds on how messy the sentence is. Clearly the argument is some people have one side and some have the other side, which James says is bogus when it comes to faith. It's either Faith AND Works or it's nothing. It can be Works without Faith and that doesn't save either.

- **The Demon Test** – if someone is trying to defend themselves saying that even though they don't have any good works emanating from their faith, they believe the right things. Well, good for you, so do the **demons**. You **believe facts about God**, so do they and they aren't saved either. Ouch! **We are not saved by understanding facts about God, we are saved by trusting our lives into His care and letting Him transform us which will result in us pouring the works of the Holy Spirit out.**
- **Proof in the Pudding**
 - **James Argues His Point Through Abraham's Example**
 - **James 2:20-24** - *"Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?"²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"¹¹—and he was called a friend of God.²⁴ You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."*
 - **Do you need proof that I'm right?** – Okay, this is going to be easy. Let's go back to the one guy that every Jew respects: Abraham.
 - **James' Example 2 - The Abraham Sacrificing Isaac Story** – **Recap the story** for new people, non-believers and those who haven't heard it.
 - **Abraham was declared good for what he did with Isaac, right?** – all the Jews agreed that Abraham was the MAN, for being willing to kill his promised child when asked, for God's honor. No one would argue that. So, James starts there. God said that Abraham was His man because he demonstrated to everyone that God was most important, even more important than his precious promised child, Isaac. Okay, **so was it Abraham thinking good thoughts, or Abraham doing good actions?** It was the action that God had to eventually stop, that proved his heart. **We all have good intentions, but only the intentions that lead to actions count.**
 - **Faith was Completed by Action** – James isn't saying that the simple act of putting Isaac on the altar was what made him righteous, but it was the reason why he was putting Isaac on the altar. **It was a relational move between him and God that prompted the action. Only then did the action have value** and prove the legitimacy of the faith that compelled it. In other words, if someone just kills their kid because they think that God wants it, they aren't called righteous. It's a true faith and connection with God that saves, but that true connection means something and it means certain actions are required. Obedience is one of those.

¹⁰ "The sacrifice of Isaac was regarded as Abraham's greatest trial of faith, in which he glorified the divine name, and to some extent it was the Jewish equivalent of the labors of Hercules."²¹⁰ In rabbinic thought Abraham is reckoned righteous on account of works of merit." NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

¹¹ "The Greek verb *dikaioō* means "to declare righteous" or (passive) "to be in the right relationship," and while the forensic and moral are both present in James, the latter dominates. The works by which Abraham, according to James, is justified are not "works of law" (*mitswôt*) but what the rabbis called "works of loving-kindness" (*Liebeswerke*); his readiness to sacrifice Isaac was proof of his faith and revealed the basic relationship of obedience. His justification therefore was based on merit, not of law but of love." NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

- **Abraham Believed = Righteousness** – remember it’s the faith that matters most. BUT, in order to have the faith be valuable and legit, it MUST result in actions.
- **A Friend of God** – what a cool description of a person of faith. A friend of God. It means there is not just a slavery mindset or a forced mindset, but a chosen willingness to walk with. It’s a sweet description.
- **Justified by works and not just by words alone** – Again and again, James makes his point over and over. He said, ‘are you following me on my example? Abraham was justified, or called righteous, or declared right with God, WHEN his actions verified his saving faith.’ It was not just Abraham having nice thoughts.
- **Paul & James Combo** – some people, who aren’t doing their homework, see a conflict between Paul’s instructions in the book of Romans and James’ argument here, when there is no conflict at all¹². They go hand in hand and are saying the same thing. Let’s take one of Paul’s famous phrases from Romans:
 - **Ro 10:9–11** – *“...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”*
 - **Or here’s another one¹³: Ephesians 2:8** – *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*
 - **Two Ways of Saying the Same Thing** – Notice that Paul always links confession (words) with belief (action). Belief is an action in the Bible, not merely a thought. It’s more like ‘trust’, which means there’s a momentum to action by definition. Also, even in the Ephesians passage Paul is using ‘works’ in a way to describe the Old Testament religious Law system of activity that people believed made them righteous independent of their heart, which was not true.
- **Combo Punch**
 - **James Makes a Secondary Argument Through Rahab’s Example**
 - **James 2:25-26** - *“And in the same way¹⁴ was not also Rahab the prostitute¹⁵ justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”*

¹² Romans 4

¹³ Romans 3:28, 11:6; Gal 2:15-16; 5:6 are also a good cross reference.

¹⁴ *“By his choice of Abraham and Rahab, therefore, James shows not only that the acid test of faith is works but also that this principle has universal application, embracing both patriarch and prostitute.”* NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

¹⁵ *“For his next, and very different, example of vital faith James selects Rahab. The contrast is deliberate and provocative, carefully designed for maximum effect: compare Philo’s mention, in parallel fashion, of Tamar after speaking of Abraham. Any attempt to soften the contrast by suggesting, for example, that she was an innkeeper and not a prostitute should be rejected... Whereas Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son, Rahab helped the “messengers” escape after apparently giving them hospitality (Heb. 11:31; 1 Clem. 12:1). Rahab’s faith was consummated and vindicated by her deeds: so she was shown to be righteous. According to Jewish tradition, she risked everything because she repented, and believed in the true God of Israel of whose mighty deeds she had heard; and in pleading for forgiveness, she cited her treatment of the messengers, and was declared righteous.”* NICNT Commentary, James Adamson

²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead."

- **James' Example 3 - Rahab the Prostitute Story** – do you know this story? **Recap it.**
- **What she did, proved what she believed** – **Rahab's actions were the outworking of her perspective internally.** She believed that the Israelites were the good guys and that God of Heaven was on their side, so she helped them. If she didn't believe that, she wouldn't have risked so much. Ultimately she was declared good by God.
- **Like a Dead Body, Faith without Evidence is Empty and Illegitimate** – A dead body is not a person if the spirit has departed, right? Right. In the same way, someone talking about their faith seem to look legit but if you get up close you can see they are empty of true faith that results in action and you find they are illegitimate. It's graphic, but apt.

Conclusion

- **Where's Our Evidence that we are saved and Christians?**
- **What's Our Christian Impact on the world around us?** Has God had access to you to make a difference in the lives of others around you?
- **Salvation, Altar Call Opportunity.**