

Authentic Christianity
Faith and Works Explained
James 2:14-20

October 4, 2020 am

HDBC

Please open your Bibles to James 2:14-20. Continuing our study of the letter written by James, the pastor of the church in Jerusalem. In it he offers very practical and convicting instruction on what it means to be an authentic Christian.

In chapter two he gets to the heart of his message. Saving faith not only changes our eternal destiny but how we live. In other words, genuine faith, the kind that results in salvation produces good works, which validate one's faith. In James 2:14-26 he deals head-on with the topic of ***faith and works***.

The section is easily divided into two main parts. In the first part, verses 14-20, James explains the relationship between faith and works. All faith is not the same. A person may have a faith, even in Jesus that does not rise to the level of genuine saving faith. As we will see today he offers a pretty clear distinction between saving faith and every other faith that falls short.

This is a pretty important thing because anything short of saving faith means you are not right with God and will not go to Heaven. So this is not something to be taken lightly. James' point is not to guilt us into doing good things, but to examine our lives to determine if our ***faith is real!*** These are eternally significant things. Don't ignore this. Dig in and listen to what he is saying, then do a radical examination of your faith to see if it measures up or falls short.

His words seem to be more of a warning than simple instruction. He points out three evidences of a faith that falls short of genuine, saving faith. If you find these things to be true of you, beware. These are signs of a **dead faith**.

Read the text: James 2:14-20 Three evidences of faith that falls short.

1. Words without works (14)

James begins argument with two rhetorical questions. The first is meant to attract the attention of the reader with its directness. The claim of faith without with no outward expression of that faith is useless. **Driver's license for person who never intends to drive.**

Second question is even more important. ***Can that faith save him?*** Two ways to ask question in Greek. One anticipates positive response, one negative. **This form anticipates the negative answer.** The expected answer is a resounding ***no!***

He makes it clear that all faith is not the same. Dealing with the quality of one's faith. James leaves no room for gray area. One's faith either rises to the level of **saving faith** or it does not. A faith that involves words without works is not saving faith.

I believe there is an unhealthy focus upon the words of one's statement of faith as opposed to the evidence of one's faith that can only be seen how a life is lived. **Far too many times in my 42 years of ministry I have heard the words of faith coming from the lips of those whose lives offered little or no corresponding evidence. I have seen too many people express faith in a *decision* they claim they made at some point earlier in life than in the evidence of a life lived for the glory of God.**

I have often seen the disconnect that James is writing about in this section. When the words and the actions do not match, it is a sign that the expressed faith falls short of saving faith. You can say all the right words, but if your life was not changed, then your spiritual condition was not changed, and your eternal destiny was not changed.

Again, James is not trying to force us into doing more things. He is calling us to look at the root of the problem . . . our faith. If it is genuine saving faith it **will produce works.** James offers a specific illustration.

2. Compassion without action (15-17)

The illustration is so clear that it needs little explanation. Person in need. Professing Christian has the power to meet the need, but only gives lip service. James says that is not true faith. Real faith, saving faith, produces ***compassion that leads to action.***

Look more closely at James' illustration. He is making it easy for them to say yes to helping a person in need. These are brothers and sisters in Christ who are said to have a need. And the needs are extremely basic. They need food to eat and clothes to wear. They are destitute.

In this hypothetical situation James indicates that those who could meet the needs simply offer words of compassion without the actions of compassion. Those words are hollow and useless because they do nothing to meet the real needs that are presented.

The apostle John agrees. *But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?* The obvious answer is that it doesn't! Saving faith leads to genuine love which leads to compassionate action.

William Booth, who founded the Salvation Army

Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again--until you can scarcely distinguish which is one and which is the other.

3. Knowledge without conviction (18-20)

In verse 18 James acknowledges how people want to compartmentalize faith and works, as if they were separate things completely independent of each other. Some are works oriented and others faith oriented. Today I'll focus on works and tomorrow maybe on my faith. James debunks that theory. Faith and works go together. Faith leads to works. They belong together.

In verse 19 James points out the folly of thinking that an intellectual belief in the existence of God is enough to save a person. **Religious intellectual.** Maybe someone who knows the right facts and can recite the truth. They have a head knowledge of Jesus and the gospel, but it has never penetrated the heart and changed the life.

Extreme illustration. Even the demons have that kind of faith, and clearly it cannot save them. This statement is meant to shock, and it does. Intellectual belief in God is not saving faith. **There is not a single atheist among the demonic host.** They all believe in God. Some are even great theologians and have known just how to twist true theology and lead millions astray. In fact some may be better theologians than some of us. But they are not saved and are not good.

They believe and **shudder**. It means to **bristle up like a frightened cat**.

His point . . . there is a belief that does not rise to saving belief. There is a faith that does not produce salvation.

In verse 20 he repeats his assertion that a work-less faith is futile faith. James was sincerely concerned about some who would read this letter. I am genuinely concerned about some who will hear this message.

Summarize in a few simple statements.

- 1) Faith without works = no salvation
- 2) Works without faith = no salvation
- 3) Faith that produces works = evidence of true salvation

This passage is a call for an honest self-assessment.

The question is not, ***am I doing enough?*** You could never do enough.

The question is ***do my actions give evidence that I am really saved?***

With that in mind, ask yourself these three questions.

1. Do my works speak as clearly of my salvation as my words?

Do people who hear my words and seem my life find a contradiction? Or, are they in sync with each other?

2. Do I readily take action to help others who are in need?

Does my compassion regularly translated into action, even action that might require me to sacrifice to meet the needs of hurting people.

3. Has my faith in Jesus gone beyond my head to my heart?

Has what I believe changed my convictions? Has it altered how I view life and how I live my life? That is the key!

Saving faith involves a surrender of my will to Christ. It involves repentance and commitment of my life to Him and His lordship. The reason many people who profess to be saved but actually are not is because they did not understand the nature of saving faith and therefore were never converted. They exercised a cheap faith because they believed in a cheap grace. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains this.**

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in The Cost of Discipleship. Christianity Today, Vol. 38, no. 2.

It is not a matter of doing more, trying harder. It is about getting it right at the beginning. If you get the **faith** right at the beginning, the works will inevitably follow. So, is it right with you? If not, now is the time.

9:15
10:20
11:35