

September 8, 2020

A devotion for today.

Every one of Jesus' disciples needs to know that real faith is not alone. True faith bears fruit and that fruit is demonstrated in the individual's lifestyle. Being a Christian is more than an intellectual understanding of God's Gospel message; it is doing and living out of the Gospel day to day in the lives of Jesus' disciples. Let us read together James 2:14-26.

*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. 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 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," 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 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.*

Over the centuries there has been an ongoing debate regarding salvation and the place of works. The following questions frame the

debate. Is salvation accomplished solely by faith in Jesus as Savior? or is salvation accomplished through faith + works? I believe that salvation is by grace through faith and not as a result of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Another question might be: "After one receives salvation must good works necessarily follow?" The challenge for us is to determine where good works fits into the puzzle with faith and salvation.

James asks a few questions: "Can a faith that has no accompanying works be genuine?" "Can this kind of faith (faith without works) lead to salvation?" These are rhetorical questions which anticipate a negative answer. James has verse 13 in mind when he asks these questions in verse 14.

This seems to contradict the Apostle Paul's position on faith and works. Paul states his position clearly in Ephesians 2:8-9 which reads; "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, [so] that no should boast." I maintain Paul and James are in agreement. The works Paul refers to are the works of the Law (TORAH). These would include; circumcision, fasting, alms giving, ect. Paul refers to ritualistic piety like that demonstrated by the Pharisees of Jesus' and Paul's time. Ritualistic piety is also demonstrated by many who attend churches all over the world. Paul makes this clear in his Epistle to the Romans as he writes in Romans 3:20; "...by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." He continues in verse 28, "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."

Notice how Paul follows up his assertion of Ephesians 2:8-9. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul writes; "For we are His [God] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

beforehand, that we should walk in them.” There is no contradiction between Paul and James.

James’ examples (vs. 15-16; 19; 21; 25) are of people who first believed and then did the works. If you recognize the physical need of another and only provide lip service then there is reason to question the sincerity of your faith. Our faith is not for show, it is not a facade. Faith is to be acted upon. Remember Jesus’ challenges us when He asks, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46).

You say you believe that God is one? So do the demons and they tremble. James is referring to an intellectual understanding of God (...you believe that; not, ...you believe in). This is also the opening of the Shema, which was recited twice a day by Pharisaic Jews.

The Shema as you recall is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and reads; “Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” James is not referring to an understanding which is the product of faith. He is referring to intellectual understanding. Consider there are numerous examples in the Gospels of demons trembling before Jesus. This manner of “faith” is useless. It has no value to anyone.

For some the example of Abraham appears to present a problem. But it does not; it confirms James’ and Paul’s position. Hebrews 11:8-10 rightly explains that Abraham in faith obeyed God. Recall too, that in the Genesis account of Abraham, that Abraham obeys God’s call well before he offers Isaac to God. It is through the works which Abraham did in obedience to God that proved his faith in God to be real.

Rahab also proves her faith by acting upon her belief as she helped the Israelite spies (Joshua 2). James concludes this section of his book by asserting that faith without accompanying works is dead, in the same way that a body is dead without breath (physically) or in the same way that a body without the holy spirit is dead in sin (spiritually). A body without breath is a corpse. A body without spirit is likewise a spiritual corpse. In the same way a faith which produces no works is purely intellectual and is dead. This kind of faith cannot save. This kind of faith deceives the individual into believing that their true spiritual condition is better than it is.

Only when our faith is put to use and we live in full commitment to Jesus and act upon His words do we possess a faith that saves. Is your faith based upon ritual and formalism? Are you trying to work your way into salvation? Understand that you can not. Put your faith in Jesus' work upon the cross as the basis for belief. Then prove your faith by acting upon the words and teachings of Jesus. Let us pray.

*Almighty God, thank You for giving us Jesus as an example of how we should live. Thank You for sending Him to the cross to die in our place. Thank You for loving us through Jesus our Lord, amen.*

Faith in Jesus, not works, is how we receive salvation.

Until the nets are full