

Studies in James

Lesson 8

Faith and Works

INTRODUCTION:

- I. The cry during the great Reformation Movement was "justification by faith!"
 - A. Reformers like Martin Luther fought long and hard against the firmly rooted teaching of Roman Catholicism that claimed we are "justified by works" and NOT "by faith!"
 1. It was the belief that we can be justified before God by works of "RIGHTEOUSNESS" – in other words, justified by "good works" WE do to EARN or MERIT salvation.
 2. This doctrine – "justification by works of righteousness" – is ABSOLUTELY FOREIGN to the Scriptures, and is one of the most DESTRUCTIVE doctrines ever taught among men.
 - B. Although Martin Luther was SINCERELY fighting an apostate doctrine of "justification by works," he unfortunately went to the OTHER extreme.
 1. Luther taught justification by FAITH ONLY – in other words, we are justified before God SOLELY on the basis of our FAITH.
 2. His beliefs had no room for works ANYWHERE.

3. In fact, he believed James' teaching on faith and works was just short of BLASPHEMY!
 - a. This is one of the reasons Martin Luther believed the epistle of James was uninspired – in fact, he called the book of James, "a book of straw!"
 - b. Luther believed James contradicted the writings of the apostle Paul on the subject of justification.
- C. Look at Paul's writing on the subject of being JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.
 1. **Ephesians 2:8-10** – *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*
 2. **2 Timothy 1:8-9** – *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began...*
 3. **Titus 3:4-7** – *But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which*

we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

D. Now, listen to James.

1. **James 2:14-26** – *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.*

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

2. On the surface, this sounds like a contradiction. It sounds as if Paul and James are at odds over the question of justification by faith verses justification by works.
 - a. Therefore, we want to discover what this passage in James is actually teaching and how it fits into the theme of "justification by faith."
 - b. It's important for us to understand these verses, because the entire letter of James centers around what we read here.
 - (1). It's as though all the verses before James 2:14-26 and all the verses that follow, are all pointing to these 12 verses in chapter 2.
 - c. And when we conclude this study together, we'll see that Paul and James have no disagreement whatsoever. They are both saying the same thing, but in different ways.

BODY:

- I. Let's begin by giving an initial clarification. "WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKS?"
 - A. At the heart of James 2:14-26 is the simple fact that GENUINE FAITH PRODUCES GENUINE WORKS.
 1. To put it another way, "If there are no GENUINE WORKS, then there is no GENUINE FAITH."
 - B. James began by asking two simple questions, "*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?*" (**v. 14**)
 1. As we said earlier, many have WRONGLY concluded James' message contradicts Paul's message of justification by faith found in the book of Romans.
 - a. **Romans 3:28** – *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*
 - (1). Paul says that we are declared righteous by the grace of God APART from the works of the LAW – we are freely justified by our faith and not by works of righteousness.
 - b. **James 2:24** – *You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*

(1). By contrast, James says there are things that should come to pass in the life of the believer, indicating that he is indeed a person who WALKS WITH GOD.

(2). In other words, James says our WORKS will DEMONSTRATE the KIND of faith we have.

(a). Our works will either demonstrate an obedient faith – like Abraham, who was the same example used by Paul.

(b). Or, our works will demonstrate a dead faith – one that does NOT demonstrate faithful obedience.

2. Now, here's an important question we all need to consider. The question is: "Can we DEMONSTRATE faithful obedience to God in every instance?"

a. Perhaps we can -- but the facts are, we don't!

b. Therefore, NO ONE can claim to be justified on the basis of their WORKS alone.

(1). Once we've sinned, we've blown it! Nothing we do – regardless of how great the work may be -- will allow us to "WORK OUR WAY BACK TO GOD!"

- c. James has already told us, *For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (James 2:10)*
- d. When we sin, we become a lawbreaker – and it doesn't matter to God what the sin is. All sin is sin. In the eyes of God the murderer is as guilty of sin as the person who cheats on their taxes, and the adulterer is just as guilty of sin as the person who tells that little white lie. Sin is sin – regardless of what sin it may be.
- e. That's why Paul says, we are saved by GRACE! – God's unmerited favor, God's undeserved forgiveness toward us.
- f. In fact, all James is saying is that if our FAITH is what it SHOULD be, our WORKS will show it!
 - (1). James isn't saying WORKS BRING JUSTIFICATION BY THEMSELVES!
 - (2). Rather, he is saying FAITH BRINGS JUSTIFICATION, but ONLY WHEN COUPLED WITH A LIVING, VIBRANT DEMONSTRATION OF THAT FAITH!
 - (a). Only then, is a person's faith VALIDATED, DECLARED TO BE AUTHENTIC, MADE RIGHT, or JUSTIFIED.

3. To put it simply, "You can't have one without the other!"
 - a. You simply cannot demonstrate your FAITH without WORKS.
- II. But the question we really need to consider is, "WHAT KIND OF FAITH SAVES?" (**James 2:14-25**)
- A. As we've already seen, James begins his discourse on faith by asking, *"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (v. 14)*
 1. In other words, James is asking, "Can a phony, empty, fruitless faith save?"
 - a. The answer is clearly, "No!"
 - B. But how can we know if we have a GENUINE FAITH – WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A GENUINE FAITH?
 1. The first characteristic of genuine faith is that it's INVOLVED, not INDIFFERENT.
 - a. James says, *"If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?" (vs. 15-16)*
 - b. James proposes a situation where a fellow Christian is in need of the basic necessities of life.

- (1). We see that need, and rather than doing anything about it, we simply say, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled!"
- (2). What good is that? Those are nothing more than meaningless and empty words.
- c. Before we're too quick to condemn, do we ever say, "Don't worry, God will take care of you. He'll come through for you."
 - (1). Did it ever occur to you that GOD'S WAY of taking care of a brother or sister in Christ may be THROUGH YOU – by the use of YOUR HANDS, YOUR WALLET, YOUR HOME, YOUR CAR?
- d. Genuine faith will always produce works of compassion and involvement.
 - (1). People who have a genuine faith become PERSONALLY involved in meeting genuine needs.
2. The second characteristic of genuine faith is that it functions in PARTNERSHIP with our works, never INDEPENDENT of works.
 - a. James says, *"Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."* (v. 17)
 - b. The most important part of this statement are the two words: *"by itself."*
 - c. Genuine faith does not exist alone.
 - (1). There is a marriage between our faith and our works.

(2). Our works VALIDATE and AUTHENTICATE our faith and say that our faith is ALIVE – it's REAL, it's GENUINE!

3. The third characteristic of genuine faith is that it's always SEEN, and is never INVISIBLE.

a. James says, *"But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."* (v. 18)

b. The word "show" means, "to bring to light, to display, to exhibit."

c. Simply put, if our faith DOESN'T show works, IT'S NOT FAITH!

d. Think about that. Can you demonstrate your faith without works? Can you exhibit, display or bring to light your faith without obedience?

(1). Certainly not!

e. Therefore, you need to be asking yourself, "do MY works BRING TO LIGHT, DISPLAY and EXHIBIT your faith?"

4. The fourth characteristic of genuine faith is that it's from the HEART, and not merely INTELLECTUAL.

a. James says, *"You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble! But do you want to*

know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?" (vs. 19-20)

- b. Through the use of sarcasm, James calls attention to the sophisticated, religious intellectual who says, "I believe in God. I believe there's something greater in this universe than us – a creator of some kind. A God-consciousness. But I'm not interested in COMMITTING myself to any particular belief."
- c. James then compares THAT kind of "INTELLECTUAL faith" to the faith demons have.
 - (1). THEIR FAITH causes them to tremble – to shudder in absolute terror.
 - (2). In the original language, the word "tremble" or "shudder" means, "to have rough, uneven flesh that makes the hair stand up on end." We call it, "gooseflesh."
- d. The word "demons" in these verses has its root in the Greek word for, "intelligence."
 - (1). James says the demons know more than any earthly intellectual will EVER know about the oneness and unity of the Godhead.

(2). But, even they KNOW THE FACTS – to the extent that these facts evoke FEAR in them – their BELIEF or FAITH adds up to NOTHING!

e. And so will OURS if our faith is not GENUINELY FROM THE HEART!

III. This all brings us to the concluding principle that is, "WHERE YOU FIND SEPARATION, YOU FIND DEATH." (**James 2:26**)

A. First , James gives us two examples of individuals whose faith was VALIDATED and AUTHENTICATED by their works.

1. The first is Abraham – the father of the Jews (a respected man).

a. **James 2:21-24** – *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.*

b. When God commanded Abraham to offer his only begotten son Isaac on an alter as a whole burnt offering, Abraham

believed that God would STILL keep His promise to make a great nation from his descendents THROUGH ISAAC.

- c. Abraham believed that SOMEHOW God would bring all those ashes and bone fragments of Isaac together once again, and they would walk down from the mountain together.
- d. Therefore, Abraham DEMONSTRATED his faith in God's promises by never flinching at the command of God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.

2. The second person is Rahab – a Gentile prostitute (a woman "insignificant" to the people).

- a. **James 2:25** – *Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*
- b. Rahab, a Gentile woman, risk her life and the lives of her family by hiding the two Israelite men who had come to spy out the defenses of the city of Jericho.
- c. She heard about the power of the God of Israel and believe in that God. But she DEMONSTRATED her faith by arranging for these two spys to escape being arrested.

B. Then, James drives home this point: *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."* (v. 26)

1. What is true of our PHYSICAL LIFE is also true of our SPIRITUAL LIFE.
 - a. Physically – when the soul leaves the body there is separation, or death.
 - b. Spiritually – when WORKS (demonstrated by our obedience) leaves the FAITH we claim to have, there is separation, or death.
 - (1). Our faith becomes lifeless and useless.
2. Faith without works is dead – it's lifeless and useless.

CONCLUSION:

- I. How are you demonstrating your faith?
 - A. Is your faith INVOLVED in meeting the SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL NEEDS of others?
 1. Or are you trusting that God will somehow take care of their need – without you?
 - B. Is the demonstration of your faith IN PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR WORKS?
 - C. Are you BRINGING TO LIGHT, DISPLAYING AND EXHIBITING your faith?
 1. Can others see it in your life?

- a. Your friends?
 - b. You family?
- D. Is your faith FROM THE HEART, or simply INTELLECTUAL – a faith that is simply based on being to QUOTE a lot of Scriptures without LIVING them?
- II. Is there a difference between your faith and the kind of faith James says you need to have?
- A. If there is, then your faith is dead – lifeless and completely useless to see you through trials and temptations.
- 1. Maybe you need to do as the disciples did, and say, "*Lord, increase my faith.*"
 - 2. That's a request the Lord will answer.
 - 3. You'll soon begin seeing ways to DEMONSTRATE your faith by the WORKS the Lord has for you alone to do.
 - a. It BEGINS by demonstrating your FAITH by a change of CHARACTER.
 - b. And it will CONTINUE to be demonstrated in your ACTIONS and ATTITUDES toward others by your change of CONDUCT.
- B. Never forget – "*FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD!*"

III. What kind of faith do you have? A living, vibrant, obedient faith, or merely an cold, lifeless, intellectual faith?

A. If you can't demonstrate the VITALITY of your faith by your works of OBEDIENCE, then you need to change a few things.

1. You can't demonstrate an obedient faith in God if you've never been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins. Therefore, for some of you, that's where YOU need to begin.
2. And if you've obeyed the gospel in the past, but you're no longer able to demonstrate an obedient faith in God by your CONTINUED obedience to the gospel of Christ, then you need you need to repent and come back to the Lord.