

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, July 13, 2016 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

GETTING PRACTICAL WITH YOUR FAITH
A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES
“You Can’t Have One Without the Other”
James 2:14-26, Selected Scriptures

OPENING EXERCISE: We claim to believe in salvation by grace alone plus nothing else, but is that really the message others are getting? Do we believe in a “works-oriented” salvation? Does anything we say or do promote or suggest that we espouse a “works-oriented” salvation? Listen as the following case studies are read and see if you can discern what is going on in each case in both the individual’s life and what they are hearing and what is perhaps being communicated by the one’s they are hearing it from:

CASE STUDY 1: I’ve started going to church and I like it. It’s very regimented and organized, and I like that. I’m the kind of person that likes order and knowing what’s expected of me. I can see what it means to be a Christian. I’m thinking I’m going to give this Christian and church thing a try. It seems to be all you have to do is show up regularly at church, read your Bible regularly, pray, give to support the church and you’re in. There are also lots of places to get involved and the talks are good and uplifting. I guess that’s all there is to it, so I’m all in! Sign-me up!

CASE STUDY 2: As I sat listening to the visiting Evangelists preach I suddenly became very concerned about whether I was truly saved or not. He kept speaking of walking down the aisle, and taking the pastor’s hand and praying this “sinners” prayer, and that if you have never done that you’re not saved. All of a sudden I began questioning everything that had happened in my life. I’ve been a Christian for several years now, but it didn’t happen that way for me. A friend told me about Jesus, and I wanted what she had. She said that all I had to do was ask Him and He would save me and make me His. I did that and was later baptized and became a member of my church. Everything I read in the Bible says that we are saved by God’s free and undeserved grace, but I was hearing this preacher that everyone seemed to respect say that if I didn’t walk the aisle, hold the pastor’s hand and pray this certain prayer that I wasn’t really saved. Maybe I missed something? Was I really saved?

The blazing brand of the Reformation was “justification by faith!” Martin Luther was the passionate blacksmith who forged the Reformation with his hammer of conviction on the anvil of the book of Romans. Since his day, evangelical Christians have borne that brand and stood upon

the principle that salvation is a faith-plus-nothing-else transaction. Especially helpful in healing that historic fire is such passages as:

Ephesians 2:8-9 – *“⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

2 Timothy 1:8-9 – *“⁸ 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, ⁹ 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.”*

Titus 3:1-7 - *“¹ Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, ² to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. ³ For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ 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, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”*

But the passage under consideration in this study seems to suggest a contradiction. We want to discover exactly what this passage from James says and how it fits into the theme of justification by faith alone. In reality, these thirteen verses capsulize the major message of James’ letter... all the verses preceding and following this passage act as arrows pointing to it.

INITIAL CLARIFICATION: What about the faith-works issue?

At the heart of James 2:14-26 is the simple fact that genuine faith produces genuine works. If this is not the case, then the validity of the faith should be questioned.

What this is not saying?: *What we are not saying when we say that if one’s faith does not produce works that validate it, it is not genuine (real)... that person is not saved? What we are not saying?*

- 1. We are not saying that it is our place to decide (determine) if someone is saved or not** – It is not our job to look at the life of another person and judgmentally pronounce that person saved or lost. God and God alone can see what is truly in one’s heart... not us. Salvation is God’s work. He does the saving, and He alone knows if one is indeed saved.
- 2. We are not saying that “good works” cannot be deceiving** – Just because someone does good things, and may perform acts of kindness, and be kind hearted does not necessarily mean that are Christian and have come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Many good men and good women who are not professing Christians do noble things, benevolent things, and things that are worth of praise.
- 3. We are not saying that the genuinely saved can’t backslide** – Genuinely saved believers can be unkind at times, can be selfish, prideful, lustful, greedy, non-benevolent, etc. Sometimes Christians, those genuinely saved, are living in a backslidden condition and the

works of their life may look like that of a lost person. We should pray and seek to restore such a one.

4. **We are not saying that works save us** – It is clear from the abundance of Scripture that we are not saved by our works (i.e. Ephesian 2:8-9, 2 Timothy 1:8-9, Titus 3:1-7). We know from God’s Word that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our works, by what we do. We are saved by what Jesus did. In saying that “works” may validate one’s faith we are not saying that those in any way actually produced salvation in that individual.

James began this portion of his letter with two questions asked back to back:

2 Questions James Asks of the Faith/Works Issue:

1. **What use is it if a man says he has faith, but he has not works?**
2. **Can that faith that is devoid of faith save him?**

Many have missed the thrust of James’ message, thinking it contradicts Paul’s message of justification by faith alone as addressed in the book of Romans. The following chart may be helpful in clear up any confusion.

	PAUL’S MESSAGE	JAMES’ MESSAGE
Emphasis	Calls attention to the “root,” looking at what happens at the moment of salvation	Calls attention to the “fruit,” looking at what happens after salvation
Perspective	Focuses on God’s part	Focuses on man’s part
Terms	Deals with “justification”	Deals with “validation”

Amplification: In Romans, Paul announced and ratified the thesis that the lost man is declared righteous by God’s grace apart from works... that man is freely justified by faith and not by works of righteousness. In contrast, James announced that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. He said that there are things which should come to pass in the life of a believer, indicating that he or she is indeed a saved person. When Paul spoke of justification, he spoke of the act of God whereby He declares righteous the believing sinner while he is in a sinning state. On the other hand, when James spoke of justification (in reference to Abraham... see 2:21), he referred to the demonstration whereby a man’s works validate him as a genuine believer.

IN-DEPTH CONSIDERATION: What kind of faith saves? (*James 2:14-25*)

James’ second question probes a bit deeper than his first, in which he basically asked, ***“What good does it do if a man says he has faith but has nothing to validate that faith?”***

- A. **The Question (James 2:14)** – “Can that faith save him?” The question is , in other words, “Can that phony, empty, fruitless faith save?” The clearly implied answer is “NO.”

- B. The Characteristics of Genuine Faith (James 2:15-20)** – In these verses James outlines four marks of authentic Christian faith.

4 Characteristics of Genuine Faith:

1. **It is not indifferent, but involved (vv.15-16)** – ¹⁵ *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ 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?”* As James put it, “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food... and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” He proposed a situation that featured fellow Christians in need of life’s necessities. He said that such expressions as “go in peace, be warmed and be filled” have not meaning in the context of need. Words of this kind are telltale signs of empty, powerless faith. On the other hand, genuine faith produces works of compassion and involvement. People of genuine faith become personally involved in meeting genuine needs.
2. **It is not independent, but in partnership (v.17)** – ¹⁷ *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* James wrote, “Thus also faith, by itself, if it does not have works is dead.” The most important part of his statement are the two little words *“by itself.”* Genuine faith does not exist alone: there must be a marriage between faith and love. Works validate faith and say that it is alive.
3. **It is not invisible, but on display (v.18)** – ¹⁸ *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.* Real faith is not hidden. James said it this way, *“... 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.”* The word *“show”* means “to bring to light, to display, to exhibit.” In concise terms, if faith doesn’t show works, it’s not faith; the real thing is displayed and evidenced in a Spirit-empowered fashion.
4. **It is not merely intellectual, but from the heart (vv.19-20)** – ¹⁹ *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! ²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?* As he did in the preceding point, James used an imaginary character through which to speak this point: “You believe God is one... the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize... that faith without works is useless?” Using extreme sarcasm, he calls attention to the sophisticated individual who would say, “I am a religious intellectual who loves the exercise of thinking, but I am not interested in involvement.” Then James compared such intellectual faith to that which demons have which causes them to shudder (“to be rough, uneven; to have gooseflesh”). The term “demon” has its roots in the Greek word for “intelligence.” James said that even the demons believe in the unity of the Godhead. Their theology is impeccable. They know much more than any earthly religious intellectual will ever know. But even though they know the facts... to the extent that the facts evoke fear in them... their belief adds up to nothing.

CONCLUDING PRINCIPLE: Wherever you find separation, you find death! (James 2:26)

After citing two examples of individuals whose faith was validated by their works (Abraham – the father of the Jews, a respected man; Rahab – a Gentile harlot, a woman “insignificant” to the

people), he drove home his point with this succinct statement: "... Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead." What is true of physical life is also true of spiritual life: physically, when the soul leaves the body there is separation... death. Spiritually, when demonstration of faith (fruit) separates from faith, that faith become lifeless and useless.