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New Hope Baptist Church Bible Study

LESSONS FROM JAMES

Week 11: Faith that Works – A Changed Life

JAMES 2:14-19

Faith Results in Good Works—James 2:14-19

James spoke to the professing believer, one who has already accepted that forgiveness and salvation, explaining that the person must live a new life. No one can be saved by works; no one can be saved without producing works. We are not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. James's point was not that works must be added to faith, but that genuine faith includes works.

Three Principles Of Faith

In chapter 2, James argues against favoritism and for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith:

1. *Commitment is an essential part of faith*
2. *Right actions are the natural by-products of true faith.*
3. *Faith without good works doesn't do anyone any good*

James emphasized the results of faith—a changed life.

JAMES 2:14

What good is it. .. if you say you have faith but do not have works? (NRSV)

Talk is cheap. Faith not accompanied by deeds has no saving value. Anyone can say he has faith, but if his life-style remains selfish and worldly, then what good is that faith? It is merely faith that believes about Jesus, not faith that believes in him.

Can faith save you? (NRSV) No, it cannot. The structure of the Greek for this question expects a negative answer. The faith that saves is faith that proves itself in the actions it produces.

Two images help us remember the importance of genuine faith:

1. On one side are people who project confidence in their standing before God and yet show no evidence that their faith affects any of their actions. They may even take pride in the fact that they can believe what they want and that no one has the right to challenge their faith. our faith must still result in action.

2. On the other side are people whose lives demonstrate such a frantic flurry of activity that they literally have no time to think or talk about their faith. We first come to God by faith, receiving what we could never hope to earn. Then, out of gratitude, we seek to serve the One who loves us in every way we possibly can. Our faith leads to grateful work.

James helps us see that genuine faith will always combine deep trust in God and consistent action in the world. It is not the one who claims to have faith, but the one who actually has faith who is saved.

Does our life count for as much? Do we declare our faith and then demonstrate its vitality throughout our life?

JAMES 2:15

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. (NIV)

The problem of world hunger is greater than most of us can visualize or respond to, so we often fail to help the problem. But James invites us to think of *a brother or sister*; not all the poor in town, or all the hungry in the state. People are fed and clothed one at a time.

JAMES 2:16

One of you says to him. James leaves no doubt that the person in need is a brother or sister in Christ. The argument is strikingly similar to John's words: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:17-18 NIV).

"Go, I wish you well...Keep warm and well fed." (NIV) The idea here is that the well-wisher is saying, "Please go, and may God take care of you because I don't have the time." This brings out the hypocrisy of those who, in a sense, are asking God to do what God wants *them* to do. *Matthew 10, is that when we pray for God to do something there is a very real chance that we may be the ones to fulfill our own prayer request, and God demands that we consider that possibility.*

But does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (NIV) Something could be done for this person. There would be plenty of clothes and food in the fellowship to care for this person, but the person was sent away empty-handed, with a prayer over his head, but no clothing on his back or food in his stomach.

James is describing Christians who miss the opportunities to help.

What About Physical Needs?

Have we received God's gracious gifts and yet withheld them from others? Here are some ways we can give:

- Look for a single parent in need of help—car repairs, child care, help with financial or legal concerns.
- Provide meals for a sick or grieving family.
- Help a student whose college finances are a burden.
- Assist a young family with clothes and toys for the children.
- Help a young couple facing stress by funding a retreat or vacation for them.

JAMES 2:17

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (NIV)

Action is the fruit of living faith. If there are no positive actions, then the professed faith is dead. The right actions prove our faith to be real faith.

In the same way, writes James, faith is not just a matter of saying the right words—it must also be accompanied by action. **Believing involves faith keeping company with action.**

The balance can be kept by asking ourselves two questions regularly:

- (1) to whom should I explain why I live the way I do? and
- (2) who needs to see more clearly that I back up my words of faith with action?

JAMES 2:18

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” (NRSV) This someone considers faith and works to be separate and alternate expressions of Christianity. “You do your deeds, I'll have my faith, and we'll be religious in our own ways.” But the two cannot be separated without ceasing to be alive. Faith lives in the action it generates; actions require faith to gain a particular meaning.

Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (NKJV)

James responded with a challenge: Show me your faith without deeds. It cannot be done! Faith cannot be demonstrated apart from action. Faith is within us; it can only be seen by the actions it produces through us. Anyone can profess faith, but only action shows its genuineness.

JAMES 2:19

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble. (NKJV) That God is one was a basic teaching of Judaism: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4 NIV—known as the *shema*).

James wanted to shock his complacent readers, so he used demons as his illustration. Paul often confronted demonic forces in his ministry; and in Ephesians 6:10–20, he admonished the early Christians to claim God's protection and defeat the spiritual forces of wickedness.

What do they believe?

- they believe in the existence of God;
- they are neither atheists nor agnostics.
- They also believe in the deity of Christ.
- Whenever they met Christ when He was on earth, they bore witness to His sonship (Mark 3:11–12). They believe in the existence of a place of punishment (Luke 8:31); and they also recognize Jesus Christ as the Judge (Mark 5:1–13).
- They submit to the power of His Word.

What he is urging us to do is to express, with our actions, the kind of life that ought to characterize someone who knows God. He is challenging us with applications of Jesus' words: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'"* (Matthew 22:37-39 NIV).