

James Chapter 2C

When I worked in the Grocery business, one of the tasks that I actually enjoyed was meeting with different clients and vendors over lunch. Once the business portion of our luncheon was completed, I often tried to direct our conversation toward the Bible, looking for an opportunity to share the Gospel.

- I did the same thing with many of my co-workers and the truck drivers who visited our facility. At that stage in life, the warehouse was my mission field.
- Occasionally I would come across a fellow believer and we would rejoice together in the grace of God. Other times I encountered people who knew the right words to say; but the deeper we engaged in conversation, the reality of their profession of faith came into question.

Consider a truck driver who, at the beginning of the conversation stated: “I understand that Jesus is the Son of God and I know I am a sinner. I raised my hand and walked the aisle when I was 12 years old. (Sounds like a believer, right?)

- BUT as the conversation continued he shared that although he was a married man he had girlfriends in several cities and children with at least a few of them and he made it embarrassingly clear that he did not intend to change his lifestyle. He was counting on the fact that God would simply forgive him.
- Was that truck driver’s faith a true and saving faith? You might say, that’s between Him and God. What do you think James would say?

Well to this point in the Epistle of James we have already discovered at least 5 distinctive characteristics of true and saving faith. Let’s review them:

- (1:12) Saving Faith endures hardship, difficulties and trials and does not yield to doubt.
- (1:21) Saving Faith shows itself in an increasing desire for moral purity.
- (1:22-23) Saving Faith produces obedience to the Word of God in the life of the Believer.
- (1:27) Saving Faith is displayed in benevolent acts toward those in need
- (2:8) Saving Faith shows no partiality and so fulfills the Royal Law.

The question that arises from conversations like the one with the truck driver is this:

- What does the Bible say about those individuals who CLAIM to have Saving Faith BUT never, never ever produce the fruit of that Faith?
- This is a tough question and we need to handle it with care.
 - Each and every one of us is a work in progress. And all true believers live at various stages of Sanctification so we don’t want to be quick to declare someone “Anathema.”
- BUT we do need to hold our lives up for evaluation by the penetrating light of God’s perfect and unchanging Word. Consider the words of the Lord Jesus:

John 15:5 (Jesus said) **I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**

- Those who have been united with Christ through God's gracious work of regeneration and redemption will inevitably produce good fruit.
- Where there is no fruit there is no life. All that remains is a fearful anticipation of fiery judgment.

As we move on in the Epistle of James the searchlight of God's Word will hold the confession of our faith up against the fruit of our life to determine if our faith is true saving faith or simply a religious smokescreen.

Here is my outline for this morning:

1. Empty Confession: James opens the paragraph with a bold statement in the form of a rhetorical question. (Vs 14)
 - a. Empty confessions of faith are proven by a lack of compassion (Vs 15-16)
 - b. Conclusion: The autopsy of a dead faith (Vs 17)
2. Separate Categories, Some would say that there is no connection between faith and deeds. One person can have faith and another deeds.
 - a. Example from the underworld. (*Demons believe in God and their faith does not produce either good deeds or salvation*)
3. Essential Connection. James employs two Biblical examples to show the essential connection between faith and works.
 - a. Abraham
 - b. Rahab

1 Empty Confession

James 2:14, **“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”**

- This very question, **“Can that faith save him?”** is the question that should have been asked of the immoral truck driver I spoke of earlier.
- The wording here in Vs 14 is hypothetical. It speaks of a person, anyone who verbally CLAIMS to possess faith. The problem is that there is no evidence in his life to support that claim.
- This Fruitless Confession of faith elicits a question from James: **“What good is it?”** Is there any profit, is there any gain to be realized by that individual who SAYS that He has faith BUT persistently, continually LACKS the works, the actions, the accomplishments that are produced by Saving Faith?
- And so James closes verse 14 with yet another question, this is a rhetorical question, specifically worded to expect a negative response.

“Can that faith” (*definite article* – that specific faith, faith that is void of works)

Can that fruitless faith save the one making the claim?

- And the expected answer is NO!

Moving on to verses 15 and 16 James provides an illustration, an example of that fruitless faith of which he speaks.

James 2: 15 **If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?**

- Just reading this illustration your heart goes out to the poor member of the community as he reaches out to a fellow believer for help.
- In modern vernacular, we would probably describe this brother as a “Homeless person.” Dressed in rags and severely malnourished.

Story of Homeless man on Girard Ave.. Going into the zoo. “Christian Brother”

The point that James is making is that false faith offers nothing more than trite words and meaningless advice at a time of desperate need. “You look cold you should try to warm up.” And “You look skinny maybe you should eat more.”

- In verse 17 James provides a summary statement. You might consider this the “moral of the story.

James 2: 17 **So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.**

- The words of an uncaring believer who fails to act, who refuses to help a brother in need are just as useless as his empty profession of faith.
- True believers are new creatures in Christ Jesus, they have been made partakers of the divine nature and even though the display of that nature remains imperfect, we can say with absolute Biblical assurance that true saving faith will always produce acts of love.

1 John 3: 16 **By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?**

Moving on it seems that James anticipates some push back from the strong statement that he’s made. So He asks the question before his readers have a chance to ask. You could say that He beats them to the punch.

- This is a literary component that is used by the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans and 1 Corinthians 15:35, **“But someone will ask, how are the dead raised.”**
- In essence James says, I know what you’re thinking... You are thinking that the gift of faith and the fruit of faith fall into two different categories. You don’t see the connection.
- That brings us to the second point:

2 Separate Categories

James 2: 18 **But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.**

- This may seem a bit confusing when you first read it, but when you boil it down, James is simply stating that Saving Faith cannot be separated from the good works that naturally flow from a redeemed heart.
- Why would James address this issue?

Well it seems as though some of James contemporaries were viewing faith and works as separate and unique endowments from God.

- They viewed them in a very similar way to the way that we view spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12: 7 **To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.** 8 **For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,** 9 **to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, (and so on....)**

- While it is true that faith can be found on the list of spiritual gifts, the spiritual gift of faith is not the same as Saving Faith.
- And James wants his readers to know that true saving faith cannot be severed from, it cannot be disconnected from a life of increasing holiness and good deeds.
- James insists that Faith and Works are intrinsically connected in the life of a true believer.
- To illustrate his point James draws our attention to the underworld. He points to the fact that Demons possess an orthodox intellectual understanding of God.

James 2: 19 **You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe — and shudder!**

- He says demons are monotheistic. They believe that there is One God. The Hebrew Shema, **"Hear o Israel the Lord our God the Lord is One!"** Demons believe that.
- They know that Jesus Christ is the one and only unique Son of God. We see that in the Gospels. Mark 3:11, **"unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God."**
- And although they have an orthodox understanding of God they live in rebellion against Him. They are dead in their sin and the only response they have to the truth of God is that of sheer terror.

So what is James saying?

Saving Faith is not simple intellectual assent. Demons believe many of the same things that we believe— they believe in the existence of God, the deity of Christ, and the presence of heaven and hell. They know that they are facing the eternal judgment of God.

- Hard Question: Do you have an intellectual understanding of God? Is your head filled with knowledge but your heart is filled with hatred?
- Does your love for God translate into Love for the Brethren?

There are countless men and women have bought into the soul-damning idea that mere intellectual assent to the truth of God in Christ is sufficient to save, and the reality is that these people are no better off than the demons who hold those same views.

Second thing that we can see from Verse 19 is this: Saving Faith is not simply an emotional response to the truth of God. According to James the faith of demons is not just intellectual but also emotional. The demons believe and they “shudder.” They are affected by the truth of God; they tremble at it.

- I wonder how many people define their faith today merely by the emotions they feel about God any given time.

James helps us to see that saving faith produces acts of love and obedience in the life of the redeemed.

- You show your faith not merely by what you think or by what you feel but by the love, the mercy, the kindness, goodness and faithfulness that arise from your redeemed soul.
- Faith is evidenced by a transformed life that is rich in good works.
- If your faith never moves beyond your intellect your faith may in fact be false.
- True Faith ACTS on the Word. So it is that Faith in our hearts is always evidenced by fruit in our lives

Moving on to verse 20 James continues his argument. Like a good lawyer He calls to the stand two supporting witnesses from the Old Testament to show the essential connection between Faith and Works.

3 Essential Connection.

James 2:20 **Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?**

- Here is the proof.

21 **Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" — and he was called a friend of God.**

- James calls Father Abraham to the stand and he makes a statement that literally shakes the courtroom.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

- WAIT a minute! Haven't I been teaching that believers are justified by Faith Alone?

Don't the 5 Solas of the Protestant Reformation clearly state that man is saved by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone, in Christ Alone, as revealed in the Scripture Alone, for the Glory of God Alone?

- Why then does James say that Father Abraham was justified by works? Is this a contradiction in the Scripture? NO! We know better.
- Since the Holy Spirit is the Author of every verse of every book in the Bible there can be NO contradictions. We simply need to dig a little deeper.

The Apostle Paul clearly states that justification, obtaining a right standing with God is by faith alone.

Romans 3: 20 *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.* 21 *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it* 22 *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:* 23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* 24 *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

So how do we reconcile the apparent differences between Paul and James?

- Was James unaware of Paul's teaching? Was James opposed to the doctrines of grace that were being promoted by Paul? The answer is NO and No.
- James was fully aware of Paul's teaching. (Acts 15) the Jerusalem Counsel.
- I would submit to you that the writings of James and Paul are in complete agreement. They simply address two different groups of people who are wrestling with two different problems.
 1. Paul is addressing a group of people who are under the false assumption that they can be justified, they can obtain a right standing with God, through their obedience to the Law of Moses. (*keep all the commandments and you're in!*)
 2. James is addressing a group of people who have a completely different assumption. He is addressing individuals who think that that salvation comes through intellectual ascent that is void of any good works.
- Paul is addressing Legalism and James is addressing Lawlessness.

When Paul speaks of Abraham's justification, he takes us to Genesis 15.

Romans 4:1 *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?* 2 *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* 3 *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."*

- In Genesis 15 Abraham received a right standing with God by faith alone. He believed the promises of God, He trusted in the revelation of God and by faith alone He was justified.
- BUT Abraham's Faith was not alone, it was accompanied by, it was vindicated by, it was shown to be complete by good works.
- James takes us to Genesis Ch 22, which is many years down the road. (from 15)
- James is NOT describing HOW Abraham obtained a right standing with God, instead He is telling us that Abraham's works serve as the vindication or the demonstration of God's justification in the life of the redeemed.

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" — and he was called a friend of God.

- Abraham's work in offering Isaac vindicates God's declaration that he has obtained a right standing before God.
- Abraham's works confirm and therefore complete his faith revealing the truth of his justification.

Rahab

James 2: 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

- IN his closing argument James points us to Rahab.
- We find Rahab's story in Joshua chapter 2. She was an inhabitant of the city of Jericho who had become convinced by the reports that she heard that the God of Israel was the true and Living God. (He dried up the Red Sea, Destroyed Pharaoh)
Listen to her confession:

Joshua 2: 11 And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

- Rahab's faith was shown to be true saving faith when she courageously and lovingly hid the Israeli spies from the King of Jericho.
- Two Brothers in dire need came to Rahab for help and she cared for them, she provided a refuge and secure passage out of the city.
- In this way she is the polar opposite of the fruitless friend who told his brother to go away, be warmed and fed.....
- James drives the point home one more time.

26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Maybe you were raised in a Christian home, you know all of the facts about Jesus, but you live your life on Campus like every other student.

- You believe that God created all things
- You are a good person, you don't do anything really bad...

Do you worship and serve other gods? Do you put other priorities before God:

- Success, money, work, family, hobbies

You may have prayed a prayer, Walked an Isle, BUT Is there any fruit in your life?

- DO you have a hunger for the Word of God? Or does it sit on the floor all week long?
- Is there a real love for the brethren in your heart?

Every day we preach the Gospel to ourselves. Every day we must express our devotion in worship, in prayer and in serving one another in love.