

James began chapter two warning of not having the faith of our Lord Jesus with respect to persons. The faith of the Lord Jesus is characterized, not by obedience of some system of laws, rules and interpretations of such, but by our impartial love one for another. That shows the reality of a person's faith in Christ, who loves us and gave Himself for us. Talk is cheap. Fine clothes do not signal faith in a church goer. Verbal blessings upon a poor beggar does not help him. The reality of our verbal blessings is demonstrated in our taking appropriate actions to help him. "No brainer!" If we do not follow up on our words in any matter they are empty and we soon enough gain a reputation as unreliable and hypocritical. Good intentions don't count for much unless carried out.

Verses 18-25 have been the subject of a great deal of controversy over the years. It is the basis of a great divide within Christendom that still throbs today. The issue of works versus faith fueled the Reformation over 500 years ago. God used various believers like Martin Luther to refute the teaching that salvation is, and can be, earned by works. The Reformists reintroduced the scriptural truth of salvation by grace in the face of great and rigorous opposition and deadly persecution at the hands of the Roman Church they were attempting to reform. With their zeal, they were under extreme pressure from those resisting reformation who were hotly defending the very basis of their religion. One can understand the reformer's concerns with this passage in James. It seemed to contradict their position based upon the truths of Romans, and other Epistles, and to give support fuel to the "enemy." Indeed the Roman Catholics still use James as the basis for their doctrines of works being required for salvation.

But James hasn't gone astray. God clearly is using James' down to earth epistle to test the reality of all professing Christians. We should not be afraid of tests that assure reality. He exposes the false teachers and the many nurturing a false security in their works. "I'm doing the best I can, what more can God expect?" doesn't cut it with righteous, holy God who gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross for our sins. Works without faith are useless. Faith without works is dead. Simply believing there is one God doesn't save. The devils (demons) believe that, and tremble. Their belief is demonstrated by their shuddering at the thought of the judgement awaiting them. But they remain unchanged. Likewise, a person's belief in God is not a passport to heaven. It is a token of his impending doom unless he humbles himself and repents of his sins, after admitting a belief in God. If he does repent and confess Christ as his Savior and Lord that faith will become evident. Evident to others, to God and even to himself. Evidenced in the works that result from the spiritually changed heart. Works meet for (suited to show)

repentance.

*Acts 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*

See also Matthew 3:8.

The Pharisees believed in God. They taught and enforced His law upon others of their countrymen. Yet they rejected the Lord and condemned Him to death. The disciples believed and though their faith was weak and faltering they believed on Him as Savior and Christ, loved Him and bowed to Him as Lord. Later James did too.

James puts forward two significant examples of faith proven by works. One is remarkable in its profound depth, the other made remarkable by the presence of some troubling details. Yet both together present the overarching power of faith despite circumstances. Faith and suited accompanying works.

**Abraham's** faith surmounted all human reasoning. He dared to believe God really meant His earlier promise, Genesis 21:12, that "in Isaac shall thy seed be called." He actually believed in faith God could and would raise Isaac from the dead if he was slain, Hebrews 11:17-19.

Likewise, **Rahab's** faith was clearly proved by her works in calling all of her loved ones to safety in her house on the wall behind the scarlet cord in the window. But James doesn't cite that story. Instead he tells of her hiding the Israeli spies. And he doesn't mention the untruth she told in her fleshly attempt to prevent their discovery or capture. The unstated truth here, in the story behind the story, is that despite her weakness and a sin associated with her actions, her faith was verified by her works in hiding the spies. Though her initial actions were not without sin they were clear evidence of her faith before God. Then her succeeding works carried her faith through to its fruitful end. Her whole story is witness to the truth that it is faith not works that saves. Yet real faith will have works proceeding from it bearing witness to its reality. Our works are never perfect and our faith is often weak but both together bundle the reality that counts with our gracious and merciful God.

Paul also witnesses to that.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8*

Don't let anyone fool you, either one without the other is dead. And reliance upon either without the other is fatal eternally. But God is faithful.

By Ron Canner, August 6, 2008