

Faith in action - Faith that works
James 2:14-26

Paul is involved his local Church, and regularly attends Sunday services, he is also is fairly committed to his small group. He is well liked by most people at work and has a lot going for him. He does say that he is a Christian and that he believes in God and all that stuff. Every now and then he finds himself in situations where his colleagues and beliefs come into conflict.

Recently one of his mates at work fiddled the hours of both of their time sheets. Paul knew that this wasn't right, but well he is his mate and after all what are mates for. He decides to turn a blind eye. And besides it really helps him financially.

This is just one example of where his actions go against his declared beliefs, there are a few other issues as well where the walk doesn't match the talk.

The Question: Is Paul a Christian? Talk about this and let's hear your answers.

Yes: Ok so it doesn't matter how we live. Just as long as we believe the right stuff. That's what counts.

No: But does that mean that Christians never sin. Does my salvation shake every time I sin?

Let's read James 2:14-26

James 2:14-26

¹⁴ What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? ¹⁵ Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶ and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

¹⁷ So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

¹⁸ Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

¹⁹ You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. ²⁰ How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

²¹ Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. ²³ And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. ²⁴ So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

²⁵ Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. ²⁶ Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

Have you ever stopped to think about what the definition of what faith is? I googled it...

- complete trust or confidence in someone or something.
- strong belief in the doctrines of a religion, based on spiritual conviction rather than proof.

Here is a more Christian based one

- Faith is the attitude whereby a person abandons all reliance on his own efforts to obtain salvation.

The unchurched will something say I have my own faith however whatever faith might mean to us or anyone else, the question is "Will that faith save you?"

The Question we need to ask is Is there a difference between faith and faith that saves?

James in this passage is doing a bit of a stir, he is being provocative. He is asking the question "Is faith alone enough to save us". Paul says "Faith is God's foundational gift". But James is asking the question "what kind of faith is it?"

It is important to realize, that there are many different kinds of faith, but only one that is a truly "saving faith". In **James 2:14-26**, we find James discussing the different kinds of faith, but naturally he wants us to make sure we have a **faith that works**.

Beginning with **verses 14-17**, James raises the first kind of faith. We might call this...

Dead faith (14-17)

1. **This is armchair faith.** We are good at this kind of participation, because this is how most of us play sport, sitting in a chair with a beer (coke) and chips, passively watching. We also do it when we watch the news. We see and hear all sorts of tragic things but never do anything about it. We get so

used to it, we are passively involved and then when something actually can be done we continue just to nod and smile and maybe give some words of sympathy. They call this Media numb or comfortably numb.

This is what James is saying. These people substitute words for deeds (read v15-17)

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¹⁷ So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

People with this kind of faith know the correct vocabulary for prayer and sound doctrine. They can even quote the right verses from the Bible but their "walk" does not measure up to their "talk"!

2. This is INTELLECTUAL faith

In this person's mind, he or she knows the doctrine of salvation, they understand the intellectual aspect of faith but they have never really given themselves to God, it can almost as though they don't seem to have the Spirit of God within them, or there is no relationship. They know the right "words", but they do not back up their words with their "works"!

It's like the one pedal bike I talked about a few weeks ago. A bike with one pedal is very difficult to ride, very difficult to make any sort of progress. Their pedal is Know the word, but they are missing the "Do the word" pedal.

Can this kind of faith save?

According to James - NO! Three times in this passage, James emphasizes that "faith without works is dead" - **James 2:17,20,26**

Any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false declaration or as James would say - a dead faith!

Gordon Fee, a biblical scholar, says "*A Christian is a person who wants to become one. If you don't really want to become one, then you are not one.*"

Dead faith is a counterfeit faith, a hugely dangerous faith. It lulls the person into a false confidence of eternal life.

As I have said I was raised in a Christian family so I have always known about God but I think this is where I was at for a good part of my early teens. Being raised in a Christian family, I knew all the right answers to all the questions, I was a committed youth groupie, went to church Sunday morning and Sunday night but I had never given myself to God, maybe I didn't have the Spirit of God, maybe I was just "in process".

What I do know is there were no works, and according to James, faith without works is dead.

Do you have this kind of faith?

Only you can answer that. That is between you and God. But according to James the measure is reasonably clear...

We have dead faith if our WALK does not measure up to our TALK!
if our WORKS do not measure up to our WORDS!

We need to beware of a single pedal faith, a mere intellectual faith. As Warren Wiersbe said,

"No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same, any more than he came into contact with a 240-volt wire and remain the same."

The next kind of faith James mentions is in **verses 18-19...**

Demonic faith (18, 19)

Yes I will admit that this is probably over stating this type of faith, I do it to shock, as I think James does to shock complacent readers, James reminds us that even "demons" have a kind of faith!

- They believe in God (there are no atheists or agnostics in the demonic world!)
- They even believe that Jesus was the Son of God - cf. Mk 3:11-12
- They also believe in the existence of hell - cf. Lk 8:31
- And they believe Jesus will be the Judge! - Mt 8:28-29

What kind of faith do "demons" have?

- Yes they believe, they have an intellectual faith
- It also impacts them, they experience it – it touches their emotions – we are told they "believe and tremble in terror"

This is one step above a "dead faith" - it involves both **intellect** and **emotions**

Can this kind of faith save?

Again according to James - No! A person can be enlightened in his mind and even stirred in his heart but still be lost! The demons tremble, church attendees sing! We can have an intellectual faith and know what Christians are meant to believe and we can have wonderful times of worship, or experiences on beaches or on bush walks where we know and feel the presence of God. We can clap, wave our arms in the air, dance, and....

13 ... speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but don't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but don't love others, I would be nothing. ³If I gave everything I have to the poor and even

sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I don't love others, I would have gained nothing.

James, and yes Paul as well, tell us that true saving faith involves something more, something that can be seen and recognized: a changed life!

Martin Luther, 16th Century, "We are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone."

Do you have this kind of faith?

- We do, if we just **believe** the right things and **feel** the right things
- We do, if our service to God does not go beyond...
 1. Intellectually adhering to the right doctrines
 2. Emotional experiences while attending services or conferences

James has suggested two kinds of faith that can **never** save: **dead** faith (involving the intellect alone), and **demonic** faith (involving the intellect and the emotions, but stopping there).

He closes this section by describing in verses 20-26 the only kind of faith that can save...

Saving Faith /Down to earth faith (20-26)

What kind of faith is this?

1. **Saving faith** involves the whole person – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength - everything
 - a. **Dead faith** touches only the intellect
 - b. **Demonic faith** involves both the mind and the emotions
 - c. **Saving faith** involves the intellect, the emotions, and the will!

True, saving faith, then, **Leads to action**

- It is not intellectual contemplation
- It is not emotionalism
- It is faith which leads to obedience in doing good works

To illustrate, James refers to two well-known persons in the bible: Abraham & Rahab. You could not find two more different people!

- Abraham was the father of the Jews; Rahab was a Gentile!
- Abraham was a godly man; Rahab was or had been a prostitute!
- Abraham was the friend of God; Rahab had belonged to the enemies of God!

What did they have in common? Both exercised saving faith in God!

- Abraham demonstrated his saving faith by his works - 20-24 He held nothing back from God. God said I want your son and Abraham rose early in the morning in prompt obedience. (Gen 22)

- Rahab demonstrated her saving faith by her works - 25-26 She reached out and took into her own care those who were needy and helpless, regardless of the cost to herself (Joshua 2)

Conclusion

So what do we learn from this passage?

- Faith without works is **dead** faith
- That "faith only" cannot save anybody
- That **saving** faith necessitates works

Now there will be a few theologians out there that will be thinking, but Brian does the Apostle Paul say we are saved by grace alone

Ephesians 2.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:8-10 is one of the most dynamic summaries of Paul's teaching. "*For by grace you have been saved.*" Paul is saying you didn't earn it, didn't deserve it and that means you can't dis-earn it. (I think I made up a word.)

"*For by grace you have been saved, through Faith.*" Trusting in Jesus. "*and this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one may boast.*"

"I'm a good person. I saved myself. I got baptized. I speak in tongues. I'll give more money." No. No one may boast. You didn't do anything to save yourself. Jesus saved you.

You ask, "Is that it? Ephesians 2:8-9 says Jesus did it all. I'm saved. There's nothing that he asks of me. So I can just sit down, and enjoy life, and wait for the Rapture." Is that it?

Next verse, verse 10. "*For we are his workmanship.*" Jesus is working on us, changing our desires, changing our nature, changing our budget, changing our speech, changing our lifestyle. "*created in Christ Jesus for good works —*" Not bad works that *contradict* our faith, good works that *complete* our faith. Not works that we're trying to make ourselves a Christian, but works that show that we belong to Christ.

It is important that each of us examine our own heart and life, and make sure that we possess a faith that works, a true **saving faith**.

Satan is the great deceiver; one of his devices is imitation. If he can convince a person that counterfeit faith is true faith...then he has that person in his power!

The obvious example of this life giving faith was given to us in Jesus in the way that he gave up everything and became like one of us. He obeyed God and even died on a cross.

- The life of faith is a life of obedience. Obedience in particular to what James calls the royal law, which is loving your neighbour.
- The life of faith is more than a private transaction of the heart with God that happened 2, 10 or 20 years ago.
- It is a life of active dedication seen in the obedience that holds nothing back from God, and the concern that holds nothing back from the needy people around you.