

FAITH IN ACTION

Key passage: James 2:14 - 26

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Faith is a key doctrine.

- The sinner is saved by faith. (Ephesians 2:8, 9)
- The believer must walk by faith. (2 Cor 5:7)
- Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrew 11:6)
- Whatever we do apart from faith is sin. (Romans 14:23)

2. Faith is not only believing in spite of evidence, but obeying in spite of consequence.

3. Faith is the confidence that God's word is true.

4. In this passage, James talks about the difference between real and fake Christians.

- He talks about how you can have a real faith.
- The entire New Testament teaches that we are saved by faith alone. "By grace, through faith."
- James comes along and says, "It's not just faith but faith and works." What is he talking about?

B. JAMES OR PAUL -WHO IS RIGHT?

1. Each is fighting a different enemy.

- Paul was fighting the problem of legalism - the problem of: "I've got to keep all the Jewish laws and regulations to be a Christian." Paul is talking to that group.
- James is not fighting legalism but laxity - those that say "It doesn't matter what you do as long as you believe."

2. Each uses the word "works" in different ways.

- When Paul uses the word "works" he is referring to Jewish laws like circumcision and similar matters.
- When James uses it, he is talking about the Christian lifestyle - acts of love. It is totally different.

3. Each focuses on a different aspect of faith.

- Paul focuses on the root of salvation - what happens to me internally. Paul is talking about, "How to know you're a Christian."

- James focuses on the fruit of salvation - what happens on the outside. James is talking about, "How to show you're a Christian."
- Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them."
- Paul in his epistles talks about faith alone, how to become a believer.
- James talks about how to behave like a believer. It is not a contradiction.
- Real faith is summed up in Eph 2:8-10
8 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.
- There are three prepositions in this passage - "by grace", "through faith", "unto good works". If you get those out of order, you're in trouble.

C. THE 5 PRINCIPLES OF REAL FAITH: How We Can Show That We Are Believers

1. Real faith is NOT just something you SAY. (v 14-17)

- Talk does not say you actually have faith, you just claim to have it. You know all the right phrases. There are a lot of people who claim to be Christians.
- Jesus said, "Not everybody who says to me 'Lord, Lord' is going to enter into the kingdom of heaven."
- Not everybody with a Christian bumper sticker is a believer. Not everybody who is a professor of Christianity is a possessor of Christianity.
- James is saying that there's more than just talk involved in real faith.

2. Real faith is NOT just something you FEEL.

- Real faith is more than just sympathy and feeling and emotion. A lot of people confuse emotions and sentiment with faith.
- You can be emotionally moved and never act on it. You can go to church and get a quiver in your liver, goose bumps, but it may never make any difference.
- Real faith takes the initiative. If you encounter a problem -you get help. You do something about it. You act on it. A real believer has practical faith - Real faith gets involved with people. (1 John 3:17)
- Real faith is generous. It wants to give. Who can count on you in a crisis?
- 1 John 3:14 says that one of the proofs of salvation is that we love other Christians.
- Do you have fellowship with believers? Real faith wants to be around other believers. You love them. Others know us as Christians when we show our love.

3. Real faith is NOT just some something you THINK.

- For some people, faith is an intellectual trip - a matter to be studied, debated, talked over and discussed.
- v. 18 James is imagining some intellectual guy who says, "You're into faith, I'm into works. That's cool. Different strokes for different folks. Let's debate it. You've got your thing, I've got mine. To each his own way. Stimulate me mentally but don't ask me to make any commitment."
- "Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do." Circle "show me".
- Real faith is visible. You can see it. It is apparent. If you claim to be a Christian, people will be able to see it. It is visible.
- Somebody said, "Faith is like calories. You can't see them but you can sure see the results." You can't see faith but you can see the results. [wind!]
- 2 Cor. 5:17
Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (Not overnight. But they start becoming new.)
- If you grab onto a 220 volt wire, you are going to know it. It is impossible for somebody as big as God to enter your life without changing you.
- James makes it clear that if your life does not change, it is questionable whether God really in it. What can I see in my life that proves it?
- 'If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?' That is a good question. That is what James was talking about. If you say "I know it!" Show it!
- Real faith always produces change.

4. Real faith is NOT just something you BELIEVE.

- v. 19 There are a lot of people who have strong beliefs in God and the Bible, and about Christ. They can recite creeds to you talk about doctrines of the Trinity, and quote Bible verses. James says, "big deal!"
- Just saying I believe in God is not enough to get you to heaven. Even the devil believes that. The Bible says in Proverbs, "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." It is foolish to be an atheist and the devil is no fool.
- The devil knows a lot more about the Bible than you do. Even his demons believe and shudder because they understand the majesty and awesomeness of God.
- The word "believe" in Greek means "to trust in, to cling to, to rely on, to commit yourself completely."
- I believe in Hitler but I'm not a Nazi. I am a Christian because I believe in Jesus but it is more than just 'head' knowledge. Many people may miss heaven by just 18 inches!

They have got it in their head but not their heart. They say "I believe in God." James says, "Big deal. Everybody believes in God. That's not enough."

5. Real faith IS something you DO.

- In the next couple of verses James illustrates that real faith is something you do. Faith is active. It is not passive.
- It is a commitment based on the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. (Romans 10:17)
- Faith is only as good as its object. We are not saved by faith in faith. We are saved by faith in Christ as revealed in the Word of God.
- Faith is a commitment involving the whole man - mind, heart and will. The mind understands the truth, the heart desires the truth and the will acts up on the truth.
- Abraham was not saved by faith and works, but a faith that works.
- James gives illustrations of two very different people, Abraham and Rahab - exact opposite extremes.
 - Abraham is a man. Rahab is a woman.
 - Abraham is Jewish. Rahab is a Gentile.
 - Abraham is a patriarch. Rahab is a prostitute.
 - Abraham is a somebody. Rahab is a nobody.
 - Abraham is a major character in the Bible. Rahab is a minor character.
- James uses these illustrations to say: It does not matter who you are as long as you have what is important to God. Abraham and Rahab had only one thing in common -- their faith in God. Their faith in God led them to an action.
- v. 20-22 Abraham behaved in a way that his belief was evidenced visibly. He obeyed God. It was an action. His works proved his faith. He held nothing back from God – not even his beloved son.
- Rahab's story in Joshua chapter 2 is the story of how a prostitute helped a couple of Israelite spies when they were coming into Jericho. Rahab ends up in the family line of Jesus. She risks her life to save the spies because she believed that their God was the true God.
- Abraham and Rahab both acted up on the word of God. Rahab heard the word, responded with her mind and emotions. Then, she did something about it – she acted with her will
- Our faith is not determined by what we do, it is demonstrated by what we do. Talk is cheap. Put your money where your mouth is. If you go around saying, "I believe in Jesus!" prove it!

D. CONCLUSION

1. Our faith is demonstrated by our actions.

- Actions speak louder than words.
- Our behavior shows what we really believe.

2. Check whether you are a real believer.

- Put your faith to the test.
- 2 Cor. 13:5
Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.

2. 5 Marks of the mature Christian with real faith, according to James:

- *Practices* the truth
- *Patient* in testing
- *Powerful* to control his tongue
- *Peacemaker*, not a trouble maker
- *Prayerful* in trials