

## JAMES Lesson 8: No Hidden Faith Allowed!

### Conviction in Works James 2: 14-26

12.7.08

#### INTRO

Soren Kierkegaard (Danish philosopher/theologian, 1813-1855) parable about DUCKLAND Sunday service and pastor Duck's sermon about flying like eagles.

Our works must match our faith. This is the HEART OF the book of JAMES – no disconnect between . . .

assurance and actions  
belief and behavior  
creed and conduct  
doctrine and deeds

We don't want a hypothetical church whose advertisement reads as follows:

The Lite Church (Lite spelled L I T E):

1. 24% fewer commitments required
2. Home of the 7.5% tithe, 15-minute sermonette and 40-minute worship service
3. We hold to only 8 commandments – take your pick!
4. We use only 3 spiritual laws
5. EVERYTHING YOU'VE WANTED IN A CHURCH . . . and LESS!

TODAY'S MESSAGE: **No hidden faith allowed!** We must have **CONVICTION in WORKS**

#### OUR TEXT: JAMES 2: 14-26

- 14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?
- 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,
- 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?
- 17 Even so **faith, if it has no works, is dead**, being by itself.
- 18 But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and **I will show you my faith by my works.**"
- 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.
- 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that **faith without works is useless?**
- 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?
- 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and **as a result of the works, faith was perfected;**

- 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.
- 24 You see that **a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.**
- 25 And in the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?
- 26 For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also **faith without works is dead.**

This is the infamous passage that, through the centuries, has given so many theologians pause and concern – such as Martin Luther. In his preface his 1522 edition of the NT he called James a “**right strawly epistle.**”

Many have long thought that this passage directly contradicts the clear teaching of the apostle Paul, and is the most flagrant doctrinal contradiction in the Bible.

James 2: 24 “*You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*”

Romans 4:28 “*For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.*”

Both Paul and James refer back to Genesis 15:6 “*Then he (Abraham) believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*” Abraham’s faith was FAITH THAT GOD WOULD KEEP HIS PROMISE – demonstrated in action when he offered up His son Isaac, always believing that GOD WOULD RAISE.

### **ANSWER #1**

Paul is speaking of before conversion – only believing FAITH can save us

James is speaking of after conversion - our true faith must show evidential works (fruit)

Jesus in Matt. 7:20 “So then, you will know them by their fruits.”

And going on to say in v. 21: “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.*”

### **ANSWER #2**

Paul is speaking about FAITH THAT IS BELIEVING AND RECEIVING (and therefore, active in action)

James is speaking about FAITH THAT IS MERE SPIRITUAL ASSENT OF BELIEF

v. 14 “*can that kind of faith save him?*”

v. 17 “*faith . . . being by itself*”

### **ANSWER #3**

I see James’ final statement: “*faith without works is dead*” as a mathematical word problem (!).

X (faith) MINUS (without) Y (works) IS (equals) ZERO (dead)

If  $X - Y = 0$  the what do we know about X and Y? They are the SAME.

True faith always shows the fruit of works, and true works always emanate from a foundation of faith.

Biblical FAITH and WORKS always work together – because they are essentially one and the same.

### **LET' LOOK AT JAMES' ARGUMENT**

#### **1. Illustration by rhetorical questions (v. 14)**

*"Can useless faith save?"*

#### **2. Illustration by faith in action (v. 15 -17)**

*"Faith by platitudes"*

#### **3. Illustration by an imaginary objector (v. 18)**

*"I can show you my silent faith"*

#### **4. Illustration through absurdity (v. 19 -20)**

*"Even the demons have 'faith'"*

#### **5. Illustration through contrasting historical figures (v. 21 –26)**

*"The Patriarch and the Prostitute"*

### **NOTICE THE KEY PRINCIPLE STATED 3 WAYS**

1. (v. 17) *"faith, if it has no works, is dead"* QUALIFIER: faith, if it is by itself

2. (v. 20) *"faith without works is useless"* QUALIFIER: faith that is merely intellectual assent

3. (v. 24) *"faith without works is dead"* QUALIFIER: faith, like the body w/o the spirit

### **JAMES 2: 14-26 (My Paraphrase)**

#### **Conviction in Works**

14. Tell me, fellow Christians, what is "saving faith?" If someone claims to be a Christian by their faith, and yet there is little visible sign of that faith in their actions, it seems to me that kind of faith is useless faith – not "saving faith."

15-16. For example, if a believing brother lacks some basic necessity such as clothing or food and you essentially tell him "blessings on you, I hope you'll be okay!" and don't make an effort to meet his need, I say your supposed faith is a sham.

17. The principle is this: Faith, if it isn't backed up by action, is dead faith.

18. Now, I can just hear someone say, "Some Christians are more private, and some are more outgoing in expressing their faith." Well, if you're one of those "private in your faith" types, I dare you to prove your faith without any action, while I prove my faith to others by living it out in action.

19-20. You believe that God is one? That's good, but think of this: the demons, as they shudder, believe the same (and they're not believers!). Can't you admit that believing alone without actions to back it up means nothing?

21-23 After all, haven't we heard Father Abraham was "justified by faith" when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? His faith and works "teamed up" so that his behavior proved his belief to be authentic. This was the fulfillment of the Scripture that says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Remember, this faith matched with action resulted in Abraham being called the friend of God.

24. So here's the principle said another way: A man is made right with God by action that demonstrates inward faith, and not by action less faith.

25. Another example would be Rahab, who was once a harlot. But she too was justified, (that is, made right with God) by her works. Remember, she received and hid the spies (Joshua and Caleb) and then let them exit by a safe way.

26. To say the principle a final way: Just like a body without a spirit is lifeless, so also faith without demonstrative action is lifeless. Works are the spirit of faith, just as faith is the spirit of works.

## **Conclusion**

**THOSE POOR DUCKS** waddled in and out of church and never flew as they were created to do.

Their "faith" was nothing more than mental assent – useless, and by itself.

Few things are as inglorious as a 'waddle'.

(And few things are as inglorious as a Christian who has a disconnect between belief and behavior)

Few things are more glorious than a duck on the wing!

(And few things are more glorious than a Christian acting like Jesus in action.)

All God's people have wings!

#1 wing: FAITH that saves – faith alone brings us to God. No "works" can save us.

#2 wing: WORKS that are the natural fruit of BIBLICAL FAITH

Beating together they lift us from our inglorious waddles to the glory of lives on the wing – soaring like eagles in God's service!

*(Thanks to R. Kent Hughes for the illustration of "Duckland")*

## **JAMES, Chapter 2 (My Paraphrase)**

### **Conviction in Equality**

1. Don't you dare call yourself a believer in our amazing Lord and Chosen One, Jesus, if you treat people differently based on their appearance or background.

2-4. Here's a test. If one person walks into to your church service looking like "a million" and another comes in looking like a "bum," will you treat them the same? Or will you give special attention or seating to the one looking great and ignore the other, even making him or her sit in a place where they might not so easily draw attention. If you'd honestly treat them differently, you fail the test. You would be making an ungodly judgment based on unfair distinctions.

5-7. As my brothers in the Lord, I really do love you. So listen up. Don't we read that God so often has chosen the poor in wealth to be rich in faith and receive His kingdom inheritance? This is exactly what God promises to all who love Him. It

doesn't make sense to dishonor the poor person. More often than not, it's the rich one who will give you a hard time, even pulling you into court or using your precious Lord's name in vain.

8-9. The highest law of God's kingdom is this: "Love others as you would want to be loved." If you do this, you're right on. But if you love people differently based on externals, you're practicing sin and guilty of breaking God's #1 law.

10-11. Here's the hard fact. Even if you were to keep all of God's law perfectly, one sin (like favoritism) makes you guilty of all in God's eyes. God forbids adultery, just like he forbids murder. But if you are clean regarding adultery, yet commit murder – you're guilty of adultery, and all the other laws as well. Ouch!

12-13. Now don't be frozen with fear in your words and actions toward others – God's royal law of love is meant to motivate and free you, not condemn you. If you show no mercy, then mercy won't come your way. But if you learn to show mercy in your assessment of others, that demonstration of mercy will trump any judgment that is due you.

### **Conviction in Works**

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## **JAMES, Chapter 1 (My Paraphrase)**

1. To my Jewish brothers of all twelve tribes, wherever you might be after having been forced out of your homeland – this letter is from James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, by calling and by choice. Dear brothers:

### **Confidence in Trials**

2-4. Take a different perspective at the many trials you face, seeing the positive in them, rather than the negative. One, your faith is being proven and strengthened. And two, you are developing endurance for the long haul of life. Don't balk at being tested, but hang in there, letting the tests accomplish their Godly purpose: your maturity, that you may be spiritually "buff" without flabbiness or weakness of character.

5. Remember, if you need wisdom (and who doesn't?), just ask God, who gives it abundantly and without making you feel bad for asking. Just ask, and Godly wisdom will indeed be given to you.

6-8. But you have to ask really believing the answer will come. No doubting allowed! Because if you doubt, you are acting just like the waves of the sea blown around by the wind – up one minute with your belief and down the next with your doubts. This kind of supposed "faith" won't get you anything from God. He doesn't accept on-again, off-again faith, which by the way, indicates instability in other areas of life.

### **Confidence in Status**

9-10. Hey, believing brother - how about this for God's "upside down" perspective on wisdom? If your earthly status is on the "humble" side, be proud that you are standing rich and tall in God's spiritual kingdom. And if your earthly status is on the "well off" side, be proud that in God's kingdom you are just a spiritual beggar. After all, your earthly status is about as secure as flowering grass in the heat of the sun.

11. See the picture? Just like the sun rises, so does your status. Then comes the "Santa Annas" of life – and just like the grass withers and the flower falls, so does your status wither and fall. What once appeared beautiful is no more. Our status, and the futile pursuits of achieving it, will soon fade away.

12. So what's worth achieving? - persevering through the trials of life and proving your Godly character through it all. This is how you will receive the true "crown of life" – God's heavenly reward – which He promises to each one of His lovers.

## **Confidence in Temptation**

13-16. I don't ever want to hear you saying, "I am being tempted by God." One, evil can never tempt a perfect God. And two, a perfect God could never lower Himself to tempt any one. Rather, it's really you that brings on temptation by your own luring lustfulness. Sin comes when you give in to temptation by acting on your lust. And when that sin gets full sway in your life it kills your relationship with God. My dear, believing friends whom I love - don't be sucked in by temptation!

17. Everything that is good is a perfect gift, especially given to you from God. "Good" is never by accident. The Giver is always our Heavenly Father, and like a bright light he never wavers or compromises in His delivery of good.

18. God exercised His Divine prerogative when He chose to pull us into truth by the power of His Word. This was so that we Jewish believers could be considered as the first ones to receive His special blessing of spiritual victory.

## **Confidence in Reactions**

19-20. Now I'm going to tell you something you already know, but you must apply it to your reactions. One, be quick to listen to others and especially to God. Two, be slow to voice your opinion. And three, put any tendency to anger on a slow fuse. Pleasing God and getting angry never go well together. The short version: open your ears, close your mouth and chill your anger.

21. You know all that leftover filth of the old life that's still seeps out? Dump it in the spiritual trash can. You know God's Word that He has planted deep inside of you? Humbly receive its wisdom and let it save you from drowning in your own foolish reactions.

## **Confidence in Religion**

22. It is delusional to think that you are religious by merely hearing the Word, believing it, and participating in a few religious activities. Rather, you prove and demonstrate your true religion by living out the Word actively in every area of your life.

23-24. Hearing the Word and not doing it is like looking at yourself in a mirror and not fixing what needs fixing. Why even look if you just go away unchanged and oblivious to the need?

25. God's Word is the perfect rulebook for life, with rules to set you free, not tie you down, and therefore worthy of a long and hard look. If you let them sink in, and turn your thinking into meaningful action and change, your life will surely be blessed for it.

26. Do you think that your religion is healthy? Then put it to the test by whether you can control your tongue. If you can't, not only is your religion worthless but you're deceiving yourself into thinking your religion is OK. It's not.

27. I'll tell you what real religion is about. It's about practicing love and care for those with special needs – like children without parents or women who have lost their

husbands. Bottom line, true religion is keeping yourself pure from the wickedness of the world!