

Place: Lurgan Baptist 22:2:2004

Reading: James 2:14-19

## PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

### 17. YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER

There was a song that was popular some years ago, and it was entitled “*Love and Marriage.*” Do you remember it? “*Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage.*” And on it went concluding in the final verse with the words, “*You can't have one without the other.*” Now faith and works go together like a horse and carriage also. You see, you can't have one without the other. Dissolve the partnership and faith dies. For faith was never designed to dwell alone, separate from the partner that proves its existence. Someone has said that faith is like calories, you can't see them but you can always see their results. And that is the major theme resonating throughout James's letter .... results. Genuine faith produces genuine results and nowhere is that theme more passionately argued than in ( 2:14-26 ) A young man in the U.S.A. who was an engineer was sent to Dublin by his company to work in a new electronics plant. It was a 2 year assignment that he had accepted because it would enable him to earn enough money to put down a deposit on a house when he returned home and also marry his sweetheart. His girlfriend had a job near her home in Tennessee and their plan was to pool their resources. They corresponded regularly but as the weeks drudged by she started to express doubts as to if he was being true or was he attracted by the Irish girls. The young engineer wrote back saying that he found the Irish girls attractive but that he was keeping himself for her. In the next mail the engineer received a package and a harmonica. “*I'm sending this to you,*” she wrote, “*so you can learn to play it and have something to take your mind off those girls.*” He wrote back, “*Thanks for the harmonica I am playing every night and thinking of you.*” At the end of his 2 year stint, the engineer was transferred back to the U.S.A. to be reunited with his girl. Her whole family was with her as he stepped off the plane, but as he rushed forward to embrace her she held up a restraining hand and said sternly, “*Just hold on, there a minute Billy Bob, before any kissing and hugging gets started here, let me hear you play that harmonica.*” That girlfriend wanted some proof that her boyfriends love was real.

Is this not the whole thrust of what is James is saying here? God wants some proof that our love and faith is real. Now this passage that we are beginning to look at is probably one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible, and perhaps at first glance its not difficult to see why. For example look at ( 2:24 ) Now that seems to run contrary to the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. Paul's great thesis in the book of Romans is that “*a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.*” ( Rom 3:28 ) It was this very issue that caused Martin Luther to label James a “*right strawy epistle,*” meaning that he felt that it lacked solid biblical doctrine. To Luther whose battle cry in the Reformation was, “*Justification by faith alone,*” James' battle cry of “*Justification by works,*” was blatant heresy. But is it really? I think that the faith and works dispute arises when people fail to make a distinction between the *Requirement for True Salvation,*

*and the Result of true Salvation.* Good works are not the requirement but they are certainly the result. You see, its impossible for someone to have a new birth experience, see old things pass away, have the God of the universe take up residence within him, and still alter his lifestyle or his inner desires one iota. Paul stresses *the Root* of Salvation, which is faith in Christ plus nothing, but James underscores *the Fruit* after Salvation.

Paul sees the fire in the fireplace, but James eyes the smoke coming out of the chimney. To James the world should be able to tell that a faith burns in our hearts by the works they see coming out in our lives. So James's whole thrust is, " *You can't have one without the other.*" For genuine faith produces genuine results. Look at how he develops this theme by noticing :

### **(1) THE CLAIM THAT IS MADE**

You see, even in the Early Church there were those who claimed they had saving faith, yet did not possess salvation. Do you recall the warning of the Saviour ?

*" Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." ( Matt 7:21 )* James says, " *What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds ? Can such faith save him ?*" Notice here:

#### **(a) WHAT THIS MAN SAYS:**

For the key word in this section is the word " *say.*"

*" Though a man say."* Now the tense here indicates that this person keeps on making this claim apparently for years. Now this is a claim, not necessarily a fact. Here is someone who says, " *I have faith, I am a Christian,*" and James' reaction is, " *Well I would like to see evidence of your faith before I can accept your claim.*" Someone comes along and says, " *I am a believer, I belong to this church, or that church.*" James says,

*" Alright produce the evidence."* Now in so doing is James not being Biblical ? Paul says, " *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature old things are passed away all things are become new.*" ( 2 Cor 5:17 ) My .... a man should not have to give his testimony by word of mouth. It should be obvious by the quality of his life that he is a changed man. (a) But notice:

#### **(b) WHAT THIS MAN LACKS:**

What good does it do, says James to say you have faith if you have no works to justify that claim ? Now here is the challenge that he makes ! What use is that kind of faith that can be summed up in words only ? James found a number of things lacking in this person with this kind of faith. For one thing, there was:

#### **1. NO COMMUNION WITH GOD:**

*Look at ( 2:19 ) J.B. Philips translates it, " So you believe that there is one God ? That's fine. So do all the devils in hell, and shudder in terror."* It may surprise some of us to discover that

demons have faith .... that they believe there is one God. ( Deut 6:4 ) They are not atheists or agnostics. Do you know that they believe in the Deity of Christ ? When Christ was come to Garda two possessed with devils cried out saying, “ *what have we to do with Thee, Jesus Thou Son of God ?*”

( Matt 8:29 Mk 1:24 3:11 Lk 4:41 ) Do you know something ? They also believe in the judgment to

come for those same evil spirits cried out, “ *Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time ?*” My .... evil spirits believe. They recognise the existence of God, the unity of God, the deity of Christ, the certainty of coming judgment but they do not have saving faith.

For James says, “ *they believe and tremble,*” the word

( phrisso ) means “ *to demonstrate a high decree of awe or terror.*” It was used by ancient Greek writers to describe hair that stands on end. But is that saving

faith ? Is that what saving faith does to a man ? When a man becomes a believer, does he shudder in terror ? Does his hair stand on end ? Is he terrified at the thought of God ? Not at all. Paul says,

“ *Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (

Rom 5:1 ) You see, the kind of faith of which James is speaking here, the kind of faith that goes no further than head knowledge does not bring a man into communion with God. My .... do you claim to be a Christian ? Do you profess to have faith ? Do you have real fellowship with God ? Or could it be that your faith is the faith of demons, a mere profession of faith without a radical change of heart ! 1.

## 2. NO COMPASSION FOR OTHERS:

James puts his point in a picture. Here is a Christian who comes into a church without the necessities of life. And the person with a spurious faith sees his needs but he does nothing to meet those needs. All he does is say a few pious words, “ *keep up your spirits, don't be discouraged, someone will come to your relief.*” Now this illustration is easy to understand because in one way or another, most of us have been that needy person, and can still remember the empty platitudes we received instead of real help. Do you see what James is saying ?

He's saying that the real proof of genuine faith is real food and real clothes ! My .... is this not what John

says ? “ *But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ?*” ( 1 Jn 3:17 ) How can we say that God's love dwells in us when we see a fellow-believer in genuine need and deliberately do nothing about it ? Will this kind of faith save us ? My .... have you a heart of compassion for others ?

Can you say what Job said ? “ *If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail. Or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof. If I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering. If his loins have not blessed me and he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep. If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate. Then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone.*” ( Job 31:16-22 ) James is saying that this person who claims to be a Christian, but there is no proof in his life, this person has 1: 2: and:

### 3. NO CONVERSION OF SELF:

“ *Can faith save him ?* ” ( 2:14 ) The Amplified Bible puts it like this, “ *Can such faith save his soul ?* ” By giving no answer James means that the answer is

“ *No.* ” Now let me stress that James is not saying that a man is not saved by grace through faith. What he is saying is whether just any kind of faith will do. Will this man’s faith do ? Will you faith do ? The kind of faith that says, “ *I believe, I am saved, I have become a Christian, I’ve been baptised, joined the church,* ” yet there are no works of love to back it up. Can that kind of faith save ? My .... the answer is no. ( Acts 8:21 ) For any profession of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false profession. Now we need to pause a moment to ask some questions. Do you claim to have faith ? Do you say that you are a Christian ? Then do you have real communion with

God ? Do you have a heart of compassion for others ? Are you truly saved ? Is your faith real, or have you got the faith of demons ? Take time with that question, for one will take you to heaven, and the other will take you to hell. (1)

#### **(2) THE CONCEPT THAT IS HEARD**

You see in ( 2:18 ) James brings before us an imaginary person who raises an objection. It seems that there is some kind of dialogue going on here.

##### **(a) *HERE IS THE ARGUMENT:***

“ *Yea a man may say .... and I have works.* ” Here’s a conversation between two people both claiming to be Christians. And one says to the other. “ *Well, you see I am a practical Christian.* ” *I believe in trying to live up to the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount. On the other hand you have so much more faith, you’re more concerned with theology and doctrine than I am. But there is no need for us to have an argument. Surely we are both right. “ You have faith and I have works.”*

We’re just different kinds of Christians, that’s all. Don’t you try to convert me to your way of thinking and I won’t try and to convert you to mine. Your Christianity is believing and my faith is all about doing. That is the argument and is it still not very much alive today ?

People say that what we need is a practical and pragmatic Christianity. All these doctrinal issues of the virgin birth, the incarnation, the atoning death of Christ, conversion and so on they’re so irrelevant. People are dying and starving in the world, let’s get out and help them. Let’s follow the example of Christ and then we’ll be received by God on the basis of our good works. My .... is that the way you’re thinking ? Have you substituted service for salvation ? Compassion for conversion ? I tell you, humanitarianism can never make you right with God. There are men and women who are literally laying down their lives to meet the needs of those who are in terrible straits, physically, mentally, emotionally and they don’t even believe in the existence of God. You see, the argument cannot stand, but:

**(b) HERE IS THE ANSWER:**

“ Show me thy faith without thy works, ( if you can after all faith is invisible ) As for me, I will demonstrate the reality of my faith by my works. ” Now is that not the Biblical position ? You see, its not good enough to have your name on a card, a church register. My .... if there is no fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life your testimony is false. The Lord Jesus said, “ By their fruits ye shall know them. ” ( Matt 7:20 ) And James says, “ I will show you my faith by my works. ” He says, “ If my faith is called into question by men or the devil then praise God I can point to a changed life, and my life bears out the validity of my claim. ”

Two men were arguing over this point of faith and works while they rowed across a river. The oarsman was a Christian and asked whether he could join in the discussion. Given permission he said, “ let us assume that one of these oars is faith and the other is works. We’ll take the works oar out of the water and just use faith. As a result of course the boat went round and round in circles. After a while he said,

“ Perhaps we’ve got the wrong one. We’ll put the “ faith, ” oar in the boat and just use “ works. ” The result of course was the same. They still around in circles. Finally, he put both oars in together and pulled straight for the shore. His point was made. You see, faith without works and works without faith will not suffice. In a true believer there is faith and works. For a man is saved by grace, through faith, unto good works. In that way faith and works blend together. ( Eph 2:10 )

**3. THE CONCLUSION THAT IS DRAWN**

Look at ( 2:17 ) Now its vitally important to notice that James does not say, “ Faith is dead without works, ” that is until works are added. Its not the addition of works that brings faith into life. No ! What James says is that if people claim to have faith and yet have no good works then **THAT** faith is not saving faith. Now let me say again there:

**(a) NO CONFLICT HERE:**

Far from contradicting Paul, James is confirming his teaching. It is true that Paul said, “ a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. ” ( Rom 3:28 ) But Paul also spoke of those “ who profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him. ” ( Titus 1:6 ) Paul’s great theme is that nobody can procure salvation by the works of the law. James’s great theme is that nobody can prove their salvation except by the works of love.

There is (a) and there is:

**(b) NO CONFUSION HERE:**

You see, James refuses to be shaken on this point.

What point ? You can’t have one without the other.

He says, “ Even so faith, if it hath not works is dead being alone. ” ( 2:17 ) That word “ alone, ” simply means “ by itself. ” But true saving faith can never be by itself, its always brings life and

life produces good works. Do you know what the great theologian John Calvin wrote ? “ it is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.” Once when the great artist Gustave Dore was travelling through Europe he lost his passport. At the next immigration check-point, he was requested to produce the document by the officer in charge. Gustave Dore replied, “ *I’ve lost my passport but its alright I’m Dore the artist.*” “ *Oh, no,*” said the officer in charge, “ *its not alright, you see we have plenty of folks every day who parade under a false identity. If you’re Dore the artist you’re going to have prove it to me.*”

Dore smiled while he opened his brief case and took out a charcoal pencil and pad. With skill and speed, with the officer watching he sketched the familiar objects that could be seen from where he stood. In a matter of minutes he handed the officer a fantastic likeness of the scenes which lay before him. The astounded officer, said “ *Now I am perfectly sure that you’re Dore for no-one else can draw like that.*” My .... do your practices match your professions ? Is the reality of your faith seen by your good works ? Someone said that salvation is like the measles. If you have it, it will pop out on you. Faith just like calories cannot be seen, but you can always see the results. My .... what results do others see in your life ? Lawyers and judges are quick to tell us that in a trial they cannot deal with hearsay. They look for evidence, hard cold facts. Can I ask you, *if you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you ? Think about that. Would there be enough evidence to convict you. Would there be someone who would take the stand and say, “ his faith was more than the faith of demons for God was a living reality to him ? He came to my home when I was in need and shared the love of Christ. He came to my home, got on his knees and led me to the Saviour.”*

My .... James is challenging us this .... he says faith and works go hand in hand. You can’t have one with the other. He says, if you say you are saved why doesn’t your life show it ? That’s a penetrating question. *Will you answer it honestly this ... ?* Have you faith of the demons ? Or have you true saving faith ? What kind of faith do you have ?