



2014 Q4 “The Book of James” Lesson 6 Faith That Works

Intro:

Imagine my delight when I saw the subject matter for this week’s lesson! For those of you who were here two weeks ago, I taught on being a “Doer of the Word”...and this week is just a continuation of that concept as we study how true, transforming, saving faith manifests itself in our works. In fact, I get to use some of the material from a couple of weeks ago that we didn’t get to cover because we ran out of time...so that made me happy.

Memory Text: “For as the body without spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James 2:26

I want to read this verse in context starting earlier in the chapter with verse 14 from the Message:

4-17 Dear friends, do you think you’ll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, “Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!” and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn’t it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense?

18 I can already hear one of you agreeing by saying, “Sounds good. You take care of the faith department, I’ll handle the works department.” Not so fast. You can no more show me your works apart from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works. Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove.

So...what is faith? What do you think of when you hear the word “faith”? We have discussed the meaning of faith in this class before...that it means trust or belief in something. When I looked up the word in the dictionary, one of the definitions said “belief that is not based on proof”. Is that the kind of faith God asks us to have?

There are two grand forces at work in the salvation of the human soul. It requires the cooperation of man with the divine agencies – **divine influences, and a strong, living, working faith**. It is in this way only that the human agent can become a laborer together with God. **The Lord does not sanction in any one of us a blind, stupid credulity**. He does not dishonor the human understanding, but, far from this, He calls for the human will to be brought into connection with the divine will. He calls for the ingenuity of the human mind, the tact, the skill, to be **strenuously exercised** in searching out the truth *as it is in Jesus*...Ye are laborers together with God. {OHC 310}.

Hear any reference to the natural law of *exertion* referenced here?



God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith. {SC 105.2}

So faith is critical...trust is critical...but what are we putting our faith in? In what or whom do we trust? “Faith in a lie will not have a sanctifying influence upon the life or character. No error is truth, or can be made truth by repetition, or by faith in it. **Sincerity will never save a soul from the consequences of believing an error**... The Lord does not want us to have a blind credulity, and call that the faith that sanctifies. The truth is the principle that sanctifies, and therefore it becomes us to know what is truth. We must compare spiritual things with spiritual. We must prove all things, but hold fast only that which is good, that which bears the divine credentials, **which lays before us the true motives and principles which should prompt us to action.**” – 2SM 56.1

Saturday’s lesson tells the story of a respected doctor and elder in a high-profile church. He prayed eloquently, filled in preaching when the pastor was gone, gave generously – and even encouraged and inspired others to give. But everything was obviously not as it seemed...and it almost never is!

Quote: **We don’t see things as they are...we see things as we are.** – Anais Nin

The end of the story says “**Though we must leave all judgment in God’s hands, the doctor’s actions certainly call into question the reality of his faith.**” Any thoughts about that statement? Any other examples in the Bible of folks whose actions might call the reality of their faith into question?

- Rahab
- Samson
- David
- Peter

So...should we use a person’s works to determine if a person’s faith is “real”? Do a person’s works have to be perfect...for their faith to be “real”? Or can God use our imperfect works to still be a blessing to someone...to meet someone else’s need...to be an answer to someone’s prayer. A true, living, saving faith manifests itself with Christ-like behaviors and the fruits of the Spirit...however, don’t mistakenly believe that anything less than perfect works indicate a lack of or absence of faith.

SUNDAY

Dead Faith



Contrast the concept of salvation by faith alone versus the text in James that says “if someone has faith but does not have works...can faith save him?”

I think we have to go back here and really focus on the order of events...and the motivating factors that must initiate and compel our “good works”.

As we’ve discussed, faith is trust...evidence-based, reasonable, rational belief. In this class we have studied that only when we discover the truth about who God is and what God’s character is like...can we dispel the lies and distortions about his character and be won back to trust. Only when this happens, are we able to open our hearts to him...to his Spirit...Then His perfect love casts out all fear and selfishness, and the Holy Spirit pours out the healing remedy Jesus achieved for us through his life, death, and resurrection – His ways, His methods, His principles...He writes His law of love on our hearts and minds. This faith/trust cascade then manifests itself in unselfish, loving, other-centered acts and behaviors we call “good works”...the exact opposite of the sinful acts cascade.

The quarterly asks: “How can we learn to better express our faith through works while protecting ourselves from the deception that our works can help save us?” Can we ever “protect ourselves”...from ourselves?

MONDAY

Saving Faith

James 2:18 is the text used here...it says “**But someone will say, “One person has faith, another has actions.” My answer is, “Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith by my actions.”** (GNT) Works are only good works if they spring from faith. Faith and works are inseparable...they are two sides of the same coin, and one cannot exist without the other. And just like a coin with two sides, 1 is the head and the other the tail. The faith comes first...then the good works – motivated by and originating from the heart transformation we just discussed.

One of the founders of our church thought this concept was so critical that she wrote an entire book called “Faith and Works”. This is the quote at the bottom of Monday’s lesson:

“If man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation, then it must be wholly of grace, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. It is wholly a free gift. Justification by faith is placed beyond controversy. And all this controversy is ended, as soon as the matter is settled that the merits of fallen man in his good works can never procure eternal life for him.” {FW 20}

Paul’s attitude toward good works? He was not against good works per se...but he was against using works as a means to salvation. I used this text 2 weeks ago...and I still like the way Paul puts it Galatians 2:16:



We know very well that we are not set right with God by rule-keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. How do we know? We tried it – and **we had the best system of rules the world has ever seen!** Convinced that no human being can please God by self-improvement, we believed in Jesus as the Messiah so that we might be set right before God by trusting in the Messiah, not by trying to be good. (MSG)

He also says in Ephesians 2:7-10:

Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. **All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish!** We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing. (MSG)

TUESDAY

The "Faith" of Demons

Third paragraph says, "The most fundamental statement of faith in the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 6:4: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!'" This verse summarizes belief in one God. "Every other Biblical teaching flows from this cardinal truth." Any thoughts about those assertions of absolutes?

Next paragraph – An intellectual faith that has no effect on how we act is useless, even demons have that type of faith. 1 Timothy 4:1 states:

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." (NIV)

The Message puts it this way: "The Spirit makes it clear that as time goes on, some are going to give up on the faith and chase after demonic illusions put forth by professional liars. These liars have lied so well and for so long that they've lost their capacity for truth."

My perception of what this means has changed dramatically in the past several years. At one point, I thought this referred to an increasing interest in magic...the supernatural, the growing popularity of things related to the occult, spiritualism, even Satan worship...and all these things have become wildly popular. But, could Paul also be referencing those who adopt Satan's methods and practices of fear and coercion...or those who preach about an angry, arbitrary, vengeful, imperial God who must punish sinners in order to be "just" and enforce his laws? One of our favorite Desire of Ages quotes in this class, "Every sin must meet its punishment...urged Satan." This is a Satanic picture of God being



presented. What are your thoughts? Am I off base here? Is the language too harsh? Are not Satan's beliefs/distortions/ lies about God's character...by their very definition...the "doctrines of devils" and "demonic illusions".

The time spent and concepts learned in this class... I have to be honest with you...have made me uncomfortable sitting in quite a few pews and squirming...because I hear this picture of God being preached in many pulpits all around here...and it makes me really sad. Is it just me...or have the natural law model we are learning...the designer versus dictator concepts...made you hyper-sensitive to having an imposed-law, imperial, dictator view of God presented?

Well, last week at Connect, Pastor Litchfield shocked me a bit by using material from a book called "Finding the Father" by Herb Montgomery. It shocked me because the ideas and picture of God presented were incredibly consistent with what we teach here...and I got afraid for him for a minute. The book's premise is that we have been lied to about God and have long accepted an incorrect picture of him. Even the few passages Litch quoted were so consistent with what we teach in this class, I immediately downloaded the book and have been reading it all week. Here is a little bit from Finding the Father:

Today, loving relationships are many times the weakest perceived quality of those who claim to be God's people. **We have become more concerned with being correct than with being Godly, right rather than righteous.** Intellectually and behaviorally correct, we have allowed love – both in our understanding of God and as the principle by which we relate to those around us – to wither by the wayside. I believe this is largely because **we have failed to understand, not in our treatment of others, but in our own perception – our own heart-level understanding – what it truly means that God. Is. Love.** The root of both our misplaced spiritual zeal and our religious malaise is that **deep within our hearts we have embraced, silently and subtly, even unknowingly, a wrong picture of God.**

Could it be that we don't have a clue what God is really like? I contend that we have been told things about God that are not true. He is not what we think. **If we are not encountering the fulfillment of every one of our desires by our experience with God, we still don't see Him for who He really is.** He is beautiful – if we could just see Him. If our minds, hearts, and eyes could be opened for just a moment, there would be a strange resonance inside each of our aching hearts, saying, "This is it. This is what I have always been seeking. This is the reason I was made." We need to ask ourselves, "How can my internal picture of God be corrected?" The answer, although quite simple, is profound. There is a doorway through which we will find ourselves surrounded by amazing love, extravagant grace, and intimate friendship. **This doorway is the greatest revelation ever to grace our planet. It is the revelation of God's character, made not by someone else, but by God himself through the transparent veil of humanity.** (A reference to Jesus' words in John 10:9). See why I am loving this book?



WEDNESDAY

Abraham's Faith?

The quarterly asks us to compare some passages from James and Paul...and although they both quote the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 15:6, they seem to arrive at opposite conclusions regarding being justified by faith or works. We have discussed the basis of Abraham's being declared "righteous" in this class several times before. The key order of events is that 1) Abraham believed (trusted), then 2) it was credited to him as righteousness.

Romans 4:20-25: That's why it is said, "Abraham was declared fit before God by trusting God to set him right." But it's not just Abraham; it's also us! The same thing gets said about us when we embrace and believe the One who brought Jesus to life when the conditions were equally hopeless. The sacrificed Jesus set us right with God. (MSG)

Gal 3:5-6: Answer this question: Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, his Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving or because you trust him to do them in you? Don't these things happen among you just as they happened with Abraham? He believed God, and that act of belief was turned into a life that was right with God.

James 2:21-24: Wasn't our ancestor Abraham "made right with God by works" when he placed his son Isaac on the sacrificial altar? Isn't it obvious that faith and works are yoked partners, that faith expresses itself in works? That the works are "works of faith"? The full meaning of "believe" in the Scripture sentence, "Abraham believed God and was set right with God," includes his action. It's that mesh of believing and acting that got Abraham named "God's friend." Is it not evident that a person is made right with God not by a barren faith but by faith fruitful in works?

Last paragraph says, "Good works are not just the outward sign of faith; they are an *outworking* of faith." Are good works necessarily an outward sign of faith? We talked a couple of weeks ago about some Biblical examples of folks who were consistently performing "good works", but not experiencing any sort of heart transformation or saving faith.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely--because he is required to do so--will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right--because right doing is pleasing to God. {COL 97.3}



A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints. Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. {ST, July 22, 1897}

And...lest you think that we are the only folks or the only denomination who understand this concept, I offer this quote from someone who spent her entire life in unselfish, sacrificial service to others...and who obviously understood the concept that it is **not all about your works**:

"I pray that you will understand the words of Jesus, 'Love one another as I have loved you.' Ask yourself 'How has he loved me? Do I really love others in the same way?' Unless this love is among us, we can kill ourselves with work and it will only be work, not love. Work without love is slavery." – Mother Teresa

Similarities between circumcision flaunted as a “badge of righteousness” in Paul’s day...and distinguishing SDA behaviors (Sabbath keeping, no drugs, no alcohol, no smoking, vegetarian diet, etc.). Do we risk these behaviors becoming merely “badges of righteousness”, and how do we avoid that trap? Is there a place for taking pride in the good things we do?

THURSDAY

The Faith of Rahab

Why is Rahab – a lying prostitute – listed in the “hall of faith?” Rahab was not saved because of her dishonesty, but in spite of it. Her heart was for God...she trusted Him, even though she was not spiritually mature or well-versed in his methods. She believed, obeyed, and trusted God with the outcome. Perfect works were not required to perfect her faith.
