



The Truth about Faith and Works

James 2:14-26

What does a living faith look like?

James is trying to teach his beloved and scattered flock how important it is to show mercy to those in need. God the Father, who gives nothing but good and perfect gifts from above, has shown them mercy through Jesus Christ. This mercy means (1) never showing favoritism to the rich and; (2) always respecting those who are without material possessions. It means treating the poor in spirit as heirs of the coming kingdom by keeping the royal law found in Scriptures—"love your neighbor as yourself."

In vv. 14-26, James continues his concern for both the congregation and the poor by insisting that the church—itsself scattered and stressed by trials, suffering, and persecution/discrimination—possess a living faith. This faith needs to show up in the way it treats the under-resourced. This is a faith which does not merely consist of words, but of works. James is calling the question: "What does a living faith look like?"

A living faith is more than pious sentiment or doctrinal correctness

What made v. 16 so shameful is that God's typical way of feeding and providing for people is through *His* people. God calls us to be the answer to that part of the Lord's Prayer which says, "Give us this day our daily bread." One scholar put it this way: "It is not the form of the statement that is reprehensible; but its functioning as a religious cover for failure to act. The more well-to-do believer does not take care of the physical needs of the other despite all their spoken good wishes." You could even argue that this prayer, "Be warm and well fed," is from the heart. But the "poor can't eat shalom!" Whether the prayer was sincerely offered or not, if a need—which I can meet—goes unmet, what good is prayer?

Furthermore, James informs believers that the demons have been to the greatest divinity school in the universe—the heaven of heavens. They know God's attributes and qualities better than theologians and pastors! It's as if James says, "You believe in one God?! Wonderful! You've just reached the spiritual maturity of a demon! Knowing the Bible is good but it's not enough. Faith without works doesn't work!"

And no, James 2:24 isn't at odds with Paul's words in Romans 3:28. R. Kent Hughes explained it this way:

Paul focuses on faith and works before conversion; James focuses is on after conversion; Paul was fighting against tradition which promoted false works salvation; James was fighting against a "lite" faith which minimized the necessity of works after coming to Christ . Paul says works cannot bring us to Christ. James after we come to Christ they are imperative.

The fruit of the tree doesn't make the tree alive; it merely proves that it's alive. For James, the issue is not between works and faith but works and words. Are we going to talk about faith? Or, will we walk in faith? "A workless doctrine is no better than a demonic faith." (Blomberg)

A living faith gets busy when it enters the presence of the poor and the presence of God

"Abraham is the classic man of faith. His faith was not a workless faith. His faith worked. The perfect example of this is that Abraham, out of obedience to God (because he had believed God), put his one and only son on the altar for sacrifice." (McKnight) And Rahab—whose story is in Joshua 2—illustrates how universal the principle of possessing a faith which works. From the father of the nation to the pagan prostitute, the principle that applies to both of them applies to all between them. (Martin)

Conclusion: "We are saved by faith alone; but saving faith is never alone"

Ironically, Martin Luther summarized what James said in the preface of his commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans:

O it is a living, busy active mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good thing incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.

Here are some ways you can show that your faith works:

- Go to *Salt & Light* on Wednesdays from 1-5 p.m. to distribute food!
- Support the Dominican Republic Missions Team on February 7, 2010!
- Go buy some diapers for Real Life Moms and bring them to the church!
- Bring these medical supplies for Northwest Haiti Christian Mission to the church!

Tylenol
Ibuprofen
Prenatal Vitamins
Stool Softeners
Polyvisol Infant Drops
Infant Tylenol
Children's Liquid Tylenol and Ibuprofen
Triple Antibiotic Cream
Hydrocortisone Cream
Children's Vitamins
Digital Thermometers
Gauze

Ace Bandages
Rubbing Alcohol
Band-Aids, Sterile Bandages
Flat Sheets
Ziploc Bags, (gallon size)
New Women's Underwear
Maxi Pads, (both for moms who come in, deliver and have nothing with them)
Infant Formula (powder)
Newborn Clothes, (onesies, caps, socks, layette material)
Premie clothes and small caps