

## The Message of the General Letters Faith Expressed in What I Do James 2:14-19

Intro: Last week we looked at faith from its definition and description in Hebrews 11. We saw that faith is “the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.”

This morning we visit a passage that is perplexing to some, heretical to some, and troublesome to all. We must take very seriously James’ comments about faith and works in this passage. We have already heard some echoes of the Apostle Paul’s teaching in previous verses—if you break one law you are guilty of all.

This passage stands as a further exposition of Paul’s doctrine of grace as outlined in Romans. Paul’s comments in **Romans 6:15 and 18** indicate the heart of his teaching about faith and works. Our deeds are an indication of the true nature of our faith: *15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.*

James is treating a contemporary issue. I believe that the church of Jesus is suffering in its witness in the world precisely because we have failed to heed the Book of James and his warnings. It did not take the early church even one generation to develop a mutated faith that did not transform behavior and could not save the soul. James saw it in the church in Jerusalem. He observed it as he traveled among the churches. And he knew that this limp and lifeless faith, disconnected from behavior, did not proceed from the Lord Jesus or represent him faithfully.

The same is true today. The most dangerous drift in the church is not toward heterodoxy but toward heteropraxy—behavior unfitting a Christian. We are concerned about our thinking. James is concerned about our behavior. He stays very close to the teachings and even language of Jesus as he writes. We hear echoes from the sermons of Christ, as we will see.

### I. SAVING FAITH HAS A CERTAIN QUALITY V14-19

I am going to begin with an observation, a statement, and an illustration.

A. First the **observation**: James is talking about someone who “claims to have faith.” Matt. 7:21: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

James is talking about a kind of faith that has no demonstration, and he is asking, Can “such faith” save you? I believe that James is addressing the ancient issue of *antinomianism*, the teaching that it is the spirit which is saved by Christ, and therefore it doesn’t matter what you do with the body. This is the notion that there is no “law” at all in the Spirit. This view has been in the church ever since the era of grace began. Paul was accused of such a view by his enemies, though he denies it vehemently in Romans 6. “How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer in it?”

B. Now the **statement**: James believes in salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus. He is not seeking to add works to the equation of salvation. Rather, he is addressing the quality and kind of faith which a person possesses. He is insisting that true saving faith is accompanied by works that complement and demonstrate that faith. Without that change of behavior, the faith of a person is in question.

Matt. 25:44-46--"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

C. Now the **illustration**. V15—"Suppose..." This illustration sounds very much like the discussion in the previous verses about not showing favoritism. James has taught us that God's love does not discriminate between the rich and the poor. He has anchored his entire teaching about this is the command, "Love your neighbor" (2:8). This *royal law*, the law of love, is demonstrated by how we treat others. We cannot claim to be keeping the law of love if our actions are not bearing this out. In a similar way, he now takes up the question of FAITH. Therefore, we have James discussing both LOVE and FAITH in the context of our behavior—how we treat others, especially the poor and needy. His illustration has to do with someone who is hungry and naked.

1. Who is this person in the illustration? It is a brother or sister. That is, we are speaking about people who are part of the church, part of the body of believers. Perhaps they come to Christ in great poverty and need.

2. What does the church member do? Nothing. He only speaks words. He suggests to them that they be clothed and fed, but he neither finds them clothes nor finds them bread. In other words, he is all words and no actions.

3. What good does it do that needy brother if we tell him that we hope he does well, but we do not do what is in our power to alleviate his hunger? This illustration connects our love to our behavior.

## II. DEAD FAITH: Genuine Faith Has Company; dead faith has no connections.

A. Dead Faith has no integrity. "In the same way," he says in v17, our *faith* is connected to our *behavior*. It may help if you think of *faith* as a verb rather than a noun. Faith is *believing*. In the Greek, the words "faith" and "believe" are from the same root. Faith is more action than emotion. It is more verb than noun. It is your soul in motion. If the soul is not in motion, the faith is not producing changed behavior, then the faith is not genuine.

B. Dead Faith has no authenticity. It is not the real thing. It is fake faith. It is faith that pretends. It may look like faith, but it is really just a plastic replica of faith.

\*\*\*You can buy a Rolex knock off for \$50 any day. But if you really look at it, you know it's not real.

C. Dead Faith has no validity. Genuine, saving faith is accompanied by, is associated with, is demonstrated by *erga*, by actions or deeds.

\*\*\*I have been having a terrible time trying to access one of my accounts on the internet. I cannot remember the password. Every time I type in my new guess, it says, "Password invalid."

This is the problem: I cannot get back to the thinking process I used when I opened that account. I have forgotten the stream I was in when I created that password. Some faith is just like an invalid password. It won't open the account. It won't give you access.

D. Dead Faith has no vitality. James again addresses the quality of this faith without works. It is DEAD. That is, it is *separated* from life. It has no life. It cannot save. It cannot transform

the individual or the world around him. It is separated from God. It is not the faith that God gives.

\*\*\*You know what it is climb into your car ready to go to church or to work or to school, turn the key, and nothing happens. You sit there for a moment and realize that you are not going anywhere in this car because the battery is dead. Some faith is just like that dead battery. It may have some qualities of living faith—it is shaped like a black box with metal posts protruding—but it will do the job. It will not take you anywhere. It will not start your soul.

### III. WORKING FAITH: Faith & Deeds Come Together v18-19

A. We cannot split faith from deeds. The objector of v18 is saying, “One has the gift of faith; another has the gifts of works.” That is, the objector is trying to avoid the responsibility of loving behavior by saying, “That is not my gift. My gift is faith.”

James will not allow us to put “deeds” in a special category for certain people in the church to do while the rest of us just believe.

B. We cannot show faith without works. You cannot “show” faith as an idea or a concept. Without works, faith is a notion. It is not motion. In order to show faith, you must put it in motion.

\*\*\*I can show you centrifugal force, but only if I put the ball in motion. Now you are seeing it. If I stop and say, “This ball has centrifugal force” you cannot see it.

C. We can show faith by deeds. Deeds, in fact, demonstrate faith most clearly. They are not fool-proof demonstrations of faith, but they are surely more accurate than words heaped upon words with no demonstration.

D. Faith is more than KNOWLEDGE. James uses the doctrine of the one, true God as an illustration here. This is certainly a true statement. “There is only one God.” You believe it? That is good. Then you believe something which is true. *The demons also believe this statement. They have knowledge of the divine nature. But they are not saved or rescued—they are terrified!* He is making the point that head knowledge is not saving faith. It must be applied to the heart, and when it is applied to the heart it transforms the individual.

CONCLUSION: Saving faith is Transformational. It is working faith. It changes everything including behavior.