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**“Faith that is Visible”**

James 2:14-26

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**James 2:14-26** (NLT)

14What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? 15Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, 16and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

17So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

18Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”

19You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. 20How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

21Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. 23And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. 24So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

25Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. 26Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

* this is the Word of the Lord

Question: **does what you do matter far more than what you believe?**

* Bible has a lot to say about this issue

**1 Timothy 4:16**

* background – written by Paul to Timothy
* Paul was his mentor
* Timothy was pastoring a cluster of house churches
* some of the house church leaders did not buy into the faith as Timothy was teaching it
* point of the letter: Timothy, stand your ground

**4:16** Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

* saying there are 2 different ways you can go wrong
* one is for you to deny the faith by your lifestyle
* one is for you to deny the teaching of Scripture
* either one will have huge impact on yourself and those you teach

**Romans 10:9-10**

9If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.

I have listened to Tony Campolo – with characteristic humor

* suggest that God doesn't care about what you believe about Jesus … won’t ask you those questions
* popular to believe that the good things you do is really all that God is interested in
* be compassionate to the poor; be good to your family; don’t ruin the environment doesn’t matter what you believe about Jesus, just live like He did

This is the belief that actions are far more important than beliefs

* patron saint of this theology is Mahatma Gandhi
* lived 1860’s to 1940’s
* very well known as the one who, through non violent means, brought about India’s independence from Great Britain

Gandhi was introduced to Jesus’ words in a book by Leo Tolstoy

* read about Jesus – saw him to be a great moral teacher
* Gandhi also lived as a great moral teacher
* treated all castes with equality
* gave away all his possessions to the poor

Yet he didn’t believe anything was special about Jesus (quote from Gandhi’s autobiography)

‘I could accept Jesus as a martyr, an embodiment of sacrifice and a divine teacher; but not as the most perfect man ever born. His death on a cross was a great example to the world; but that there was a great mysterious or miraculous virtue in it – my heart could not accept. The pious love of Christians did not give me anything that the lives of other men of other faiths had failed to give. I had seen in other lives the same reformation that I had heard of among many Christians.

Philosophically there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. From the point of view of sacrifice, it seemed to me that the Hindus greatly surpassed the Christians. It was impossible for me to regard Christianity as a perfect religion or even the greatest of all religions. I cannot concede to Christ a solitary throne.’

* conclusion: actions matter far more than beliefs

Into this very question steps James:

**v.14** What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?

* is he saying the same thing as Gandhi?
* no, James writes that profession must be accompanied by practice

**Question**: do James and Paul contradict one another?

**v.24** we are shown to be right with God (justified) by what we do, not by faith alone

* but Paul writes that we are justified by faith alone ...
* is the Bible inconsistent?
* how do these two perspectives relate with one another?

Illustration: major sports trade

* both cities write story about the loss of their star player
* both stories profile the loss of their player
* different stories but profiling parts of the same story

What is better?

* one singular story from one perspective?
* multiple accounts from multiple perspectives?
* which provides greater depth and insight?
* which approach is more trustworthy?

James is providing depth perception to Paul

* gospel: belief and behavior
* both Paul & James use the term 'justify'

Justify:

a. 'to make right, debt free'

b. 'to authenticate that the bill is paid, account

 is settled

Paul: cannot earn your way into favor with God

* nothing you can do to help pay the debt

James: your works demonstrate the reality of your faith in Christ

* talking about the evidence of your faith

Let’s look at a couple of things Paul says

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

* most people who are familiar with this verse, stop precisely where I have
* notice the next verse

**v.10** For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

* in other words there is a reason that you have been saved
* that you might do the good works that He has designed for you!
* ‘handiwork’ means we are His voice, hands, feet …

**Romans 1:5** Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to faith and obedience for his name's sake.

* ‘faith and obedience’
* that is the gospel
* a faith commitment will produce obedience
* obedience is the outcome

**What are the markers of authentic faith?**

1. authentic faith moves beyond belief

**v.19-20** You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. 20How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

* you believe - so do the demons
* demons: know the truth about Jesus
* demons: are shaken by that truth ... because of their nature (steal, kill, destroy, lie ...)
* point: authentic faith is not just possessing a set of beliefs in God

2. authentic faith generates life change

* compassion for the broken, disadvantaged
* socially marginalized
* no economic means, no inheritance
* no advocates

**v.14-17** What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? 15Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, 16and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? 17So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

* sign of living faith is the growth of active love and compassion for the broken
* not associated with ... but involved

3. authentic faith flows out of a friendship with

 God

**v.21-24**

21Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. 23And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. 24So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Called the 'friend of God'

* not based on 'quid pro quo' (something for something)
* not imposed

True friendship

* enjoy one another's company, fellowship
* choose to be with one another
* this is the essence of true friendship
* spend time because of the way they understand life, relationships, vision, ministry, work ...
* not to get something ...

When we understand the gospel

* in a relationship with God because of what Jesus has done - not what we do
* only then do we understand that our life work is because of Jesus
	+ not to satisfy our sense of self worth
	+ not to earn His love and acceptance
* then we do all of our works out of our love for Him

Illus:

* shortly after we were married, I was with a friend and I stopped to buy flowers
* he said: 'you don't have to do that - I need to do that because I'm not yet married'
* I said: 'it is because I am married that I do this'
	+ not to get her to love me any more
	+ just because we are friends!

When the relationship is secure - there is true friendship

* not trying to prove something or earn something
* just living for His glory because of His love
* true friendship

So why is James talking about Abraham?

* story in Genesis 22 - Mt. Moriah
* his only son
* climbed early morning ... 'God himself will provide the lamb'
* v.12 'now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld your son, your only son'

word for **'fear'**: some combination of deepest awe and respect + strongest love and affection

* difference between Abraham's fear and the demon's shuddering
* both had awe & respect
* only Abraham had love and affection
* demon's hide from God
* Abraham runs toward God
	+ difference is friendship

There is another only son - God's son

* not a test of faith, but an act of sacrifice
* Jesus went up the hill to the cross
* out of love for you and me
* we run to Jesus
* befriend the poor
* care for the broken
* our faith is active - because we are friends