

Putting faith to work

Jas. 2:14-26

Intro: All of us throughout our lives have been given many opportunities to learn and to develop strong convictions about many things. We have firm conclusions about what is right and what is wrong. God wants us to hold our convictions with sincerity and strength.

But consider this: Every truth we hold with conviction has an implied responsibility or action. We cannot successfully separate what we believe, with what we are or how we live.

Yet it is really easy to think and to become convinced that we are good Christians on the merits of how strongly we believe rather than what we do. What does God think about it? For an answer let's turn to James chapter 2. James confronts a common mindset among professing disciples.

The main theme: Faith without works is dead!

It is important that we define the terms lest we produce irreconcilable conflicts in the Scripture.

By faith, James is referring to the intellectual acknowledgment of truth--the mental acceptance of some proposition.

By works, James is referring to acts of obedience that show allegiance to truth. He speaks of the performance of deeds that put truth into action.

Just as the spirit must be joined to the body to be alive, so works must be joined to faith for it to be alive.

Faith coupled with good intentions without works is dead! (v. 14-17)

Here is a man with strong conviction: "I believe all brothers and sisters should have the necessities of life".

Here is a man with good intentions: "Go in peace. Be warmed and filled".

Do you see the self-delusion in that? This man does not see himself as God sees him. His good intentions and well wishes have deceived him. He would probably smile as he said so, not ever thinking, "I'm the one who ought to help this man!" Such a faith is useless.

People are always talking about what they would like to see done.

I believe there ought to be more preachers supported.

I believe there ought to be more love in the congregation.

I believe there ought to be more enthusiasm in the worship.

I believe there ought to be more people being baptized.

And even as they speak it is clear that they have no plans to do something about it. For them good intentions become a substitute for obedience.

Faith coupled with right emotions without works is dead! (v. 18-20)

We are made so that what we believe with conviction often stirs our emotions. And sometimes they show through in righteous indignation or anxiety for someone who teaches or practices error.

James shows us that even Satan's angels, the demons, have a strong faith.

Interestingly, none of the demons are atheists or agnostics. They exist only among the ranks of men. Demons know as well as any Jew the words of Deut. 6:4. Hear Israel, the Lord our God is one!

Moreover the demons feel strong emotions. They are so afraid of God that they tremble in fear at the possibilities of His judgment.

Yet, what use is a faith like that? What fruit does it produce?

I've heard people say to me through the years and about other preachers through the years. I was moved by that lesson. Demons are moved by the thoughts of God; but they are still demons!

Only faith that is coupled with right deeds can justify us!

How can faith ever be shown without acting upon it?

v. 18

A person may say he believes something; but what is the real proof that he believes it? It is when he puts that faith to work in doing what he says he believes.

James gives us two OT examples. Abraham and Rahab.

In many ways they were very different. Abraham was man, Rahab a woman. Abraham the head of the Jewish people; Rahab a Canaanite; Abraham a man of years of moral service to God; Rahab a woman whose life had been immoral.

Both were justified the same way! All are justified the same way-- through an obedient faith!

Abraham was justified by works in offering Isaac (Gen. 22).

If we could imagine what was going through Abraham's mind it might be something like this. I believe that God will make of me a great nation. He promised me that through Isaac my descendants will be named. I don't know how God will keep His word, but I believe that He will. Maybe he'll raise Isaac from the dead and I'll have him back. I'll trust God and do what he says.

"Faith is not believing in spite of evidence, but obeying in spite of consequence".

It was by means of works that that faith was perfected or realized its end or goal. It was this kind of faith that brought him into the friendship of God. And it demonstrates clearly that a man is justified by works and not faith alone!

Rahab also was justified by works in receiving the spies.

This woman risked her life to welcome the spies of Israel and acknowledged the truth that she had heard about God's

judgment of Egypt and her faith in His power to destroy the Canaanites.

Her faith moved beyond intellectual understanding, beyond fear, to action.

Applications

Is the effort to practice truth equal to the strength of my conviction against error? Cf. divorce and remarriage; what are you willing to do to have a good marriage or to save a marriage?

What aspirations do you have for Perry Heights? What could you do now to make those things happen?

Is there known truth you intend to obey someday? What will you do about it today?

Did this lesson move you? To do what?

Conclusion: What we believe is important! Our faith will save us only if it moves us to act in obedience to God.