

The Book of James, Session 4

James 2:14-26, Faith and Works

A question that can trouble us is, "How can we be sure someone is a Christian?"

- We have to look for more than words; many claim to be Christians and it is clear from their stated beliefs and practices that they do not place their trust in Jesus. One man said, "When someone I don't know pushes me to accept Jesus as my Savior I quickly do so, just to get them off my back."
- Words need to be accompanied by actions. Our actions will never be complete and always honor God, but James makes the clear point that true faith will lead to action.

Paul made the same connection in Ephesians 2:8-10; "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

In vss. 8-9 Paul makes it crystal clear that our relationship with Jesus is created and based upon the grace of God. It is never due to our works. It is a gift!

Verse 10 immediately follows in Paul's train of thought. He states that the appropriate, natural by-product of faith is good works which God has prepared for us to do.

While our **relationship** with God is a gift of grace, our grateful **response** to God's work is to do the good works He has prepared for us to do.

Grace is opposed to earning, but grace is not opposed to effort!!

- Most importantly we need to look at the heart. Paul raises the bar even higher than James, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, echoing the teaching of Jesus.

Paul states that whatever good thing we do for God or others is literally nothing if it is not motivated by love. Doing good without love is simply moralism....it is not a sign of saving faith and a heart that is filled with God's love flowing over to others through humble service!

This echoes Jesus' challenging response to the question posed to him in Matthew 22:34-40; "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." And then he added, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

So, How can we know if someone is a Christian? Only God can truly understand and judge fairly but we can look at what someone says. Better yet, we can watch what they do. Most importantly, we can try and discern what is in their heart.

Ask yourself; What am I saying? What am I doing? How am I loving?!

James 2:15-17: The vast majority of good deeds are “mundane” in nature, but often significant in impact.

Remember: It is easy to dismiss what we do as not important but the impact of simple acts of service can be tremendous and lasting!

Jesus also taught how, by abiding in Him, God can do great things through us; John 15:1-17 He is the vine, we are the branches. If we remain in him we bear fruit.

- Apart from Jesus we can do nothing!
- Abiding with Jesus there is no limit to what God can do in and through us!
- The fundamental impact of abiding in Jesus is that we love God and love others. That love is expressed through our actions.

James 2:18: The Either/Or argument, 2:18a The Both/And response, 2:18b

Both/And > Either/Or! Faith and deeds are each incomplete without the other.

2:20-26; Two illustrations

Abraham: “His faith and his actions were working together and His faith was made complete by what he did.”

Rahab: “Rahab the prostitute was considered righteous for what she did.”

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever struggled with the question of whether or not someone is a Christian?
2. James says that actions > words. Jesus and Paul say loving > words and action. What challenges you most about the need for right words, actions and love?
3. How can you strengthen your heart? Are you spending enough time with God to receive His love for you on a regular basis? What might you need to change?
4. Good deeds often look small. Have you ever had someone do something small for you which actually had a great impact?
5. We looked at John 15. How do you abide with Jesus? What makes abiding difficult?
6. James gives us two illustrations of faith and works; Abraham and Rahab. What about their stories encourages you? Challenges you?