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Faith Without Works

Dear Friend,

It would be interesting to know the variety of different messages that have been preached using the following verse: (James 2:26)

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

With what seems to be a fairly simple message, how is it that so many different ideas can emerge? At the risk of sounding like I’ve got this all figured out, I would like to share some things I am convinced the Holy Ghost has finally been able to get over to me. In no way do I mean to give you the impression that if you have heard this preached another way, then forget what they taught because “this is what it really means”. Unfortunately, too many of us preachers do just that and before long you don’t know who’s right. First and foremost the Holy Ghost’s voice should be above any other voice in your life teaching you truth.

I have heard messages from preachers, as I’m sure you have, who have used this verse referring to the word “works” and taught about corresponding actions to your faith. I’m not disagreeing with what they preached, but just maybe their attention was too narrowly focused on one aspect of faith. Instead of seeing faith in a broad, general sense, such as the Christian faith, as I believe James was actually referring, faith is only looked at as the element necessary in order to receive from God. The teaching goes on to say that we must have corresponding actions in order to release our faith.

The “corresponding action” could be a variety of different things. For example, I have heard ministers alluding to things they have done or not done in the natural as the “corresponding action” for receiving their healing. Some of this was clearly God ordained and the results were evident. Others, sadly, gave some the impression that all they needed to do was stop taking their medicine as an act of faith, which ended in some very bad outcomes.

Another popular example of “corresponding action” was the giving of finances. I am all for giving finances, but not the way so many have taught. Without getting into a lot of details and risk sounding critical of other preachers, let me just say that any giving needs to come from a pure heart of love and not with an eye towards what you will receive as a return on your investment.

I know when I came upon this verse years ago I found myself drifting toward that same thinking and believed I needed to **do something** to reinforce my faith stand for whatever I was believing God for. The truth is that believing is enough because whatever you are asking God for, as far as healing and provision, has already been allocated for you. (Ephesians 1:3)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

This natural world wasn't first. The spirit world was first, actually it has always existed, and this natural world is dependent on the spirit world. Consequently, if we are now blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ that must mean that we are equally blessed in this dependent, natural world. That being the case, we are more blessed than we can even imagine and it's only our ability to believe and receive what is already ours that limits us; not how many offerings we have given or whether or not we go to doctors or throw our medicine away.

Now, years later as I have taken an unbiased look at the words of James, I'm discovering that just possibly the main message he was trying to pass on may have been something quite different than what I was taught. For example, what if his use of the word “faith” here was more in a general sense, like the faith of Christianity, instead of the more specific idea of the spiritual force of faith, as is defined in Hebrews 11:1.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen”

If that is truly the case, then we have a much different message being taught in the 14th -26th verse of James chapter 2 than we might have ever heard. Instead of the idea that James is telling us to give offerings or do away with our medicine as a corresponding action to our faith, what if he is simply saying that our confession of being a Christian should be followed up with actions that correspond with what it means to be a Christian. (James 2:14)

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?”

If a person says that they are a Christian, but absolutely nothing in their life supports their confession, is the act of saying they are a Christian enough? It is as though we in this country have tried to boil down the Gospel to the point that we are looking for the bare minimum of what is necessary to “go to heaven”. I believe what James is saying here is that the simple fact a person declares they are a Christian without one shred of evidence that supports their claim isn't sufficient.

Don't misunderstand; it's not the corresponding actions that saves a person, but rather the change on the inside from darkness to light. Although the proof of the change, the difference in the individuals actions, should be evident to those around them.

James' point here is that with the confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should come the evidence of change with right actions. The change comes first and then the right actions follow. Some want to put on “right actions” thinking that makes them a Christian. They simply have the cart in front of the horse. The change is first and the right actions follow.

Here's an example to help make my point, hopefully this won't offend any women. Just because a woman is growing larger in her stomach area does not necessarily mean she's pregnant. It might be an indicator of the possibility that she is pregnant. I remember once years ago that I made a comment to a woman that had seemingly grown larger overnight wondering if she was expecting a child. I learned right then, never do that because she was not pregnant. Assuming something based on what you can only see in the natural can be very dangerous.

Instead of having to run around and tell everyone you are a Christian, the evidence of your conversion should be clearly seen by those around you. With that thought in mind, look at the verses that follow. (James 2:15-17)

“If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, (16) and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be you warmed and filled; notwithstanding you give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? (17) Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

Think about what he is saying here. James is giving an example of someone who just ignored the plight of a brother or sister instead of helping them. He has gone from talking about faith without works, to giving an example of the works with which he is referring. The “faith” of being a believer should have been seen through the actions of giving to someone in need, and not because something was expected in return, but simply because it was born out of the motivation of love.

In short, to derive a message from verse 14 in which the works being described when performed were intended to enrich you the giver, ie: 100 fold return, is to me a departure from the real message James is preaching. James is talking about how those who have confessed the Lordship of Jesus Christ and have experienced the new birth should have actions that correspond with the change that has taken place within them. In other words, **we shouldn't have to run around and tell people we are Christians because the fruit of our life should be so unmistakably different than the rest of the world that people just know.**

When we give, we give because something on the inside of us wants to give and bless others. We are not doing it with an eye towards what we are going to receive in return. Love, according to Paul's definition in I Corinthians 13, does not seek its own. Seems to me that if a person gives because they are looking for what they can get in return, then their motivation is not truly the God kind of love.

The conclusion is simple; by developing a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ on a daily basis our hearts will become tender towards Him. Loving others and living a life that looks like Jesus' life on the earth will become natural. The end result will be “works” that substantiate our confession of “faith” as Christians.

~ Jesus Loves You!

Mark Jenkins