

LIVING FAITH – The Book of JAMES Part 3 'Faith Alive'

Luther's Concern: James seemed to him to be teaching that FAITH is not ENOUGH; you also need GOOD WORKS to be saved.

Paul's Concern: Jewish converts trying to drag Christianity back from pure GRACE into forms of LEGALISM.

James' Concern: The twin extremes of WORKS-RIGHEOUSNESS & EASY-BELIEVISM.

When you hear the phrase "faith and works," what reactions or assumptions surface for you personally?
Why do you think this tension between grace and obedience has been such a recurring issue in the church?
Which concern do you resonate with most – Paul's fear of legalism or James's fear of easy-believism? Why?

Where do GOOD WORKS come into it?

For PAUL (Eph 2:10): Good works are GOD-ORDAINED, the FRUIT of saving grace.

For JAMES (James 2:14,20,26): Those same good works PROVE our FAITH is GENUINE.

Paul & James are not ENEMIES, but PARTNERS.

- * Paul opposed works as a BASIS for SALVATION;
James opposes faith that produces NO OBEDIENCE.
- * Paul speaks to the ROOT of salvation; James to the FRUIT.

How does understanding that Paul is speaking to the root of salvation and James to the fruit help clarify the apparent contradiction?
In your own words, how would you explain the difference between works as a basis for salvation and works as evidence of salvation?
What dangers arise when either the root or the fruit is emphasised at the expense of the other?

3 TYPES of Faith

1. DEAD faith (v17): Inactive, ineffectual, superficial.
2. DEMONIC faith (v19-20): Intellectually correct, but emotionally unmoved ... 'Even the demons believe'
3. DYNAMIC faith (v22): Alive, responsive, purposeful, fruitful.

How would you describe DEAD faith in today's Christian culture?
What does DEMONIC faith reveal about the difference between knowing truth and being transformed by truth?
Why do you think James presses so hard toward DYNAMIC faith rather than settling for correct belief?

The CHALLENGE: Is your faith ALIVE?

1. You OBEY HARD SCRIPTURE whatever, whenever
(Matt 5:43-48, 18:21-22, 16:24-25)

What is the relationship between faith and obedience?
Which of Jesus' 'hard teachings' do you find most challenging to obey, and why?

2. Your WORDS are FULL of faith
(James 3:9-10, Prov 18:21, Mark 11:23)

How do our everyday words reveal what we truly believe about God?
When facing difficulty, do your words tend to magnify the problem or the promise? Is it usually fear or faith? What does that indicate?

3. Your Christian life is CHARACTERISED by COURAGE
(Acts 7, Dan 6:6-12, Acts 16:16-40)

Where do you sense fear most often competing with faith in your walk with Christ?
What might courageous obedience look like in your current circumstances?

4. The COMPASSION of Christ pours out in GENEROSITY
(James 2:18, Rom 5:5, Gal 5:6)

Why do you think James links faith so closely with care for the poor?
In what ways can generosity become a visible expression of Christ's compassion through us?
What might it reveal about our faith when compassion remains only a feeling and not an action?