

CHAPTER V.

THE DEVIL'S FAITH

James 2:14-26

Introduction

Faith has come to mean some kind of magic word by which men shall do the impossible, even to the acquisition of heaven. The word really means to believe, and in most places in the scripture it could be so translated without doing violence to the intended thought of the writer. Thus, one who has faith is one who believes.

A popular song during the 1950s concerned a ram that did the impossible because he believed in himself. The ram butted a huge 10,000 kilowatt dam over and over until finally he broke down the dam. The point of the song was to believe in yourself with unwavering faith and don't give up; and the impossible will be accomplished. There is some point in the message of the song, for perseverance will often lead one to accomplish the seemingly impossible. The miraculous power often attached to *faith* in religion goes far beyond the power of perseverance.

Faith "is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." Heb. 11:1 is probably the most quoted definition of faith and perhaps the most concise statement in the Scriptures. Faith, however, is used with slightly differing variations of meanings. Sometimes the word is used of a belief in the truthfulness and accuracy of the Scriptural narrative and teachings. Sometimes it refers to the acceptance of God's grace through Christ. Sometimes it refers to the truth and faithfulness of God. It is also used for the doctrine of the gospel, which is the object of faith.

In each case, however, faith is a conviction, an assurance or trust. It is an attitude through which we put our confidence in something else . . . the object of faith. Faith without this object in which we can trust has no meaning. Faith in itself is valueless, meaningless, fruitless, and completely vague, being void of concrete application. Yet, many people seem to have a faith with no object. They speak of the miraculous possibility of accomplishment if they have faith. This is not faith in something, or in someone, but just *have faith*.

Their faith is really in faith. They believe that believing will make it so. This is a form of wishful thinking that enables a person to live completely in a make-believe world. In other words since a person has faith in the power of belief, he can believe anything he wishes and all is well. Faith in itself does *absolutely nothing!*

Then again, all objects of faith do not accomplish things for the believer. Faith may be put in an idol made of stone, and the idol would still do absolutely nothing. Faith may be put in a god fabricated out of one's imagination, and since this god is non-existent and is not Jehovah God, nothing will be accomplished by that god. Faith may be put in a system of salvation or forgiveness not ordained by God and this system will promise nothing to the believer.

Furthermore, if faith is placed in one not worthy of such confidence, the thing accomplished by the object of that faith may be the opposite of that which is expected. One may place faith in a person, in a minister, in a loved one; and then discover that this person does not accomplish the good and noble things expected. Instead may come evil and ignoble actions that disappoint and awaken one to his misplaced faith.

In what is your faith? Have you placed your trust in Jesus? Do you implicitly trust Him who will never disappoint; and who, being the same yesterday, today and forever, will never change? Or do you place your faith in a person who is subject to change and sin? Do you place your faith in the elusive faith itself?

And again, how *much* faith do you have? Is your faith in Jesus strong enough that you trust Him, and believe His Word? Is your conviction in the Christ whom you cannot see strong enough that you will *act* on this conviction, and conform your life to His revelation in the Word of God? Such is the question in the opening Scriptures of James treatment of faith without works, or the *devil's faith*.

Outline

The deeds that come out of a worthwhile faith are so essential that to have a faith without such deeds would be completely profitless. Such a faith that will not cause the believer to work will not work for the believer. It is the kind of faith the devil has, and being alone without works is fruitless and will not justify.

THE RELATION OF FAITH AND WORKS 2:14-26
(THE DEVIL'S FAITH)

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 CAN FAITH-ONLY SAVE?

Text 2:14

- 2:14. What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? Can that faith save him?

Queries

129. What is the difference between profitable and non-profitable? i.e., What would make a thing have profit?
 130. Is there any profit whatsoever in a faith that would not be strong enough to prompt a man to action? (Think carefully, and consider the claims of modern psychologists.)
 131. Does v. 14 suggest that the person with such a faith does absolutely *nothing*? What kind of works is it then that is not accomplished by this person?
 132. What profit does this verse say should be expected?
 133. What answer does James expect to the question?

Paraphrases

- A. 2:14. Of what use is it, my brothers, for a man to have a faith that is not strong enough to prompt him to action? Would such a faith bring him salvation?
 B.*2:14. Dear brothers, what's the use of saying that you have faith and are Christians if you aren't proving it by helping others? Will *that* kind of faith save anyone?

Summary

Faith without works does no good and will save no one.

Comment

The man who says he has faith, yet does not conform his action, may be sincere in his belief. We should not imply from the "say he hath" of v. 14 that the man is claiming something he does not have and he knows he does not have. There is no indication that the man does not believe, any more than v. 19 indicates the devil does not believe. In fact, it would seem that the man is sincere in his conviction, but for some reason is not prompted to action. The point is that the *faith* is not to be blamed for the man's lack of action, but the *man himself* is to be blamed. Evidently the will of the man has a flaw, or his love for Christ is faulty, or he wavers between two opinions, or he has too much affection for things of this world. Whatever his reason, it is the man himself that is condemned for his lack of action, (v. 24). His conviction that Jesus is the Christ can be absolute, yet, because of other loves or other flaws he does not surrender himself to Christ.

The profitless state of the man who has faith without works is the emphasis of the verse. Modern psychologists will argue some tentative and emotional profit from a conviction that does not prompt action. A conviction that "there is some one up there" is supposed to give us a measure of assurance we need in moments when we revert to our childhood dependence upon our parents. Or a conviction that "someone" knows the answers to the problems that we find beyond us leaves us assurance that the world is not left in complete chaos and in aimless meandering. These "profits" (?) are so nebulous as to be worthless, especially in comparison with the grand profit that should be expected through faith in Christ.

James question, "can that faith save him?" expects the obvious answer "no!" This is obvious not only because of the thought-logic of the sentence itself, but because of the illustration and explanation that follows. The obvious answer "no" is reinforced so that we can see the fruitlessness of clinging to a faith that is not accompanied by a life surrendered to Jesus.

What James means by "works" in v. 14 is often questioned. Did he mean the fruits of the spirit, the good deeds of the Christian,

the conduct of one who has long since surrendered to Jesus? (see Matt. 5:16; 23:3; Rom. 2:6; John 3:20). Did he mean any *obedience* to the plain commandments of Christ? Did he mean what the world usually terms "good deeds", i.e., "visiting the widows and orphans?" (1:21; 1:25-26). Does he mean by works the same as Paul's use of the term in Rom. 3:28; 4:2?

Quite obviously James is speaking of an entirely different concept of "works" than that of Paul in Romans 3 & 4. Paul was speaking of works of merit, of works that earn the right to heaven, of works that are complete and perfect and will not require a Savior. James is speaking of works as obedience to Christ, the surrendered life that goes far beyond a mere conviction that Jesus is the Christ. Although James makes it clear the works of which he speaks are necessary (2:24), it is clear that these works earn nothing. The faith that works and prays is essential, but the salvation and healing come from the Lord, not from that faith. (see 5:15). God has ordained to work *through* a faith that obeys. God works the salvation, which is a free gift, a grace. He gives this salvation to those who choose to surrender their life by faith. To have faith yet not to surrender the life in action, is to fail to meet the requirements for the free gift of salvation.

Paul, too, uses the word "works" in the way that James uses it. To keep the readers from misunderstanding the Roman letter, Paul began and ended the epistle with necessity for obedience to be coupled with faith. (see Rom. 1:5 and 16:26). The "obedience of faith" of which Paul speaks is evidently very similar to the "works of faith" of which James speaks. In Philippians 2:12 Paul says the Christian must *work* out his salvation. In Ephesians 2:9 the Christian is created unto *good works*. In Romans 6:13 the Christian is admonished to present his members as *instruments of righteousness*. The kind of life lived by the Christian was very important in Paul's teaching. "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die," Rom. 8:13. Paul also has much to say about the "fruit of the Spirit" and bringing forth "fruit unto God." To say that Paul and James did not agree in their doctrine is to completely misunderstand one of them, or both.

The salvation which faith without works does not bring, can mean nothing but the salvation from hell and eternal separation from God. This salvation that Christ gives through His death is not obtained except through a faith that works, or the obedience of faith.

In 1:22 James warns to "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers

only." He, also, makes it clear that the purpose is to "save your souls", and that the person who hears and does not *do* has "excluded" himself.

Much in the same way he makes a contrast in 2:14 that is developed in the rest of the chapter. A confession of Christ, coming from a real conviction, does nothing for the person who does not *do* the word. James is saying that the man who is saved and who has the promise of heaven must *live* a real Christian life, and not merely have faith without the life that goes with it.

FAITH-ONLY IS DEAD, BEING ALONE (EXAMPLE NO. 1)

Text 2:15-17

- 2:15. If a brother or sister be naked and in lack of food,
16. and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed
and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the
body; what doth it profit?
17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead in itself.

Queries

134. Just what is dead in v. 17?
135. Is the brother or sister of v. 15 a Christian? Would this question have any bearing on the point of the illustration?
136. Do you think that helping the hungry or naked is the only kind of works intended to here be coupled with faith?
137. What is the obvious expected answer to the question in v. 16?
138. Is James arguing that people who say faith alone is enough for salvation will act this way?
139. Do you think the person was absolutely *naked* when he was sent away?
140. Explain how the action of the person who sent them away illustrates faith. (i.e. faith without works).
141. Is James contrasting faith and works here? What is he contrasting?
142. "What doth it profit?" What does the "it" refer to?
143. How would we properly express "Go in peace" today?

Paraphrases

- A. 2:15 If a Christian comes to you in threadbare clothing and hungry.
16. and you say to him: "Goodbye" . . . I hope you find something to wear and something to eat!" And yet you do not give him anything to wear or eat, have you helped him?
 17. In the same way your belief in Jesus, if it is not coupled with obedience, is a dead faith.
- B.*2:15 If you have a friend who is in need of food and clothing
16. And you say to him, "Well, goodbye, and God bless you stay warm and eat hearty", and then don't give him clothes or food, what good does that do?
 17. So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. You must also do good to prove that you have faith. Faith without good deeds is dead and useless.

Comment

"So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith". Gal. 6:10. In v. 16 James makes the same emphasis in his illustration regarding the necessity for good works. For a Christian not to do good to members of his own family (or faith), is unthinkable. Thus, the absurdity of faith without works (i.e., compassion without mercy, 2:13) is made all the clearer. He has chosen for the illustration the one we would love the most (the Christian) and placed him in a position of most dire necessity. The "naked" refers to scanty clothing, or clothing which is so threadbare that it could hardly be counted as clothing. It does not mean absolutely no clothing (see margin John 21:3 ASV).

The phrase "go in peace" is an expression of genuine concern for the needy, and is not intended to sound hollow or mocking. Rather the genuineness of the expression stands in sharp contrast with the lack of action to bring the wish about.

It may be proper here to point out the possible argument in favor of the church's caring for its own needy. This seems to be the assumption of the context. And if intended, seems in contrast with

the church's practice of releasing its members to the government relief rolls. This is not suggesting that the man should be a cold ward of the church budget, but the help comes of genuine compassion of one brother for another.

The possibility of faith without works is made clear; but how is this faith different from the faith that does have works? James seems to indicate that the only difference is in the possession of works, (and of course the results are different). A great many seem to prefer to emphasize a kind of faith, rather than the absence of presence of works. They would seem to infer that the presence of the works is of no importance, but rather the genuineness of the faith. They would claim that it is a genuine and a sham faith that is contrasted, rather than a faith with works and a faith without works. In the next illustration James clears up the question when he affirms the devils *really do* believe, even to the extent of trembling!

When v. 17 points to the deadness of the faith, it is not to say the faith is non-existent; but rather it is dead and profitless as far as results are concerned. Perhaps it could be best said this way: we have no right to accuse a man of lying who said he believed but did nothing about the belief. But rather, as does James, we should encourage that man to *do* something about that which he professes to believe. The trouble may not be with his belief, but rather with his will-power, with his commitment, and, possibly, his love of sin.

"But there is a difference in the kind of faith, for James himself says that one is a *"dead faith within itself"*, you may argue. To keep the thought in harmony with the rest of his teaching, we might put it this way: "Faith, if it have not works, is dead being by itself." What is James really comparing? He is not comparing faith, with works. Nor is he really comparing two different kinds of faith, but rather he seems to be comparing a faith only (faith that is not accompanied by works) with the same faith that is not alone (faith with works). It seems to be the works that makes one dead (fruitless) and one alive (with results).

Among the faculties of the "inner man" (Spiritual man) are man's intellect, his will, and his emotion. With the intellect man believes, (faith). With the will man determines that which he should do, (choice). With the emotion man is motivated to act, (deeds). Faith, if it is to bring profit must go "all the way." from

belief, to choice, to action. If your conviction goes no further than your intellect, you may have "faith", but you are not a Christian! And because this faith, being alone, does not bring the hoped-for results of salvation, James calls it a dead faith.

GODLY FAITH VS. THE DEVIL'S FAITH

Text 2:18-20

- 2:18 Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith.
19. Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well: the demons also believe and shudder.
20. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren?

Queries

144. What did the man of verse 18 really say? (Could you put it in your own words?)
145. Just who is the speaker in verse 18? Is it the man who has faith without works? (Look carefully at what he said!)
146. Who said, "show me thy faith apart from thy works, etc?"
147. To whom did he say it?
148. Is it possible to show faith apart from thy works, as v. 18 states?
149. Can faith *exist* apart from works?
150. Can works exist apart from faith?
151. How is this faith apart from works defined in verse 19?
152. What do the demons have to do with the argument?
153. 19a appears to obviously be faith without works, then why does James say, "Thou doest well?"
154. Why do the demons shudder?
155. Do we have any proof from the gospel narratives that the demons believe?
156. Why refer to the man of v. 20 as a "vain" man?
157. What is the meaning of "barren?"

Paraphrases

- A. 2:18 Yes, some man might possibly say, "You have the faith, and I have the works". Let someone show to me his faith without works, if he can. As for me, I will show my faith by the works I do.
19. You have faith that Jehovah is the only God, and this is good; but just remember the demons also believe this and they tremble with fear of their fate!
20. Do you really desire proof, O man with the futile reasoning, that faith without works does not work?
- B.*18. But someone may say, "You think the way to God is by faith alone, plus nothing; well, I say that good deeds are important too, for without good deeds you cannot show me whether you have faith or not; but anyone can see that I believe by the way I act."
19. You think "believing" is enough, do you? Believing in one God? Well, remember that the devils believe this too, and believe it so strongly that they tremble in terror!
20. Dear foolish man! When will you ever learn that "believing" is useless without *doing* what God wants you to? Faith that does not result in good deeds is not real faith.

Comment

The man speaking in this verse seems to be some observer outside . . . neither James, nor the ones to whom James is speaking. The speaking man is obviously not the one who has "faith only", for he says: "You have faith, and I have works". It appears here that this third party is introducing a new thought. "You have the faith with no works . . . I have the works with no faith". "You claim the belief in Jesus, but your life is no different. Your submission to the Lord goes no further than your lips. The life you live does not agree with what you say. You have compassion without expression. Now as for me, I have the works. I show my compassion by helping my fellow man. When I see a brother in need, I go to his service. No, I don't need your faith, for I do the good deeds without your faith. I am a doer, not a believer. You might call my gospel a "social gospel" for we are not so concerned with what a man thinks in his heart as what he does in his life.

Our missionaries show the helpless people around the world how to raise better crops. Our ministers visit the jails and offer psychological help to those who are in need of such help. We offer food to the hungry, and clothing to the 'naked'.

If this is the argument of the third party, James dismisses it with a very brief statement, implying that we all know this man is wrong. It is as if this third party is quoted in defense of the man who has faith without works. This faith-only party may be saying: "Well, it's better to have faith without works than to have works without faith. Works only will get you nowhere!"

"All right," says James, "show me your 'faith only'. "But as for me, I will show you my faith by my works!"

There seems to be a bit of sarcasm in James reply. "Let's see you demonstrate without doing, if you can!" It would be difficult indeed to do without doing, to demonstrate without demonstrating, to show without showing! The faith-only man may tell of his faith, but his fellowman would have to take his word for it. He could not show it.

Fallacious is the conviction that religion is only for the inside man—that God's grace could not possibly have conditions attached that required man to act; that man is saved without deeds; that the teaching of God is salvation by "faith only".

Proof for such a "faith-only" doctrine is usually taken from Paul's Roman epistle. Yet Paul is most emphatic in stating that a man must "work out" his salvation; that a man must "obey", that a man must "present his *body* as a living sacrifice; holy, acceptable unto God." Not only must a man do this, but it is a "reasonable" service—that which is no more than what is right and proper—that which everyone should understand is God's right to expect. (See Romans 1:5; 12:1 ff., 16:26).

"As for me, I will show you my faith by my works." What other way is there to show a faith? And how many times has the apostle John taught that by expressing our love for our fellow man we express our love for the Father? Did not Jesus Himself show us that "As ye have *done* it unto the least of these, my brethren, you have *done it unto me*?" And if James is unable to convince a man that God requires a man show his faith in God by deeds to his fellowman, then he should read carefully the epistles of John, the words of Jesus, the teaching of Paul; in fact the entire new Testament!

When James turns aside to an imaginary person, and argues, "Show me your faith without your works (if you can)", he is using the Greek Diatribe style of argument. He turns to the imaginary opponent and addresses him directly as if he were there in person. This is a very effective debating style, used often by the Old Testament prophets, as well as the Greek debaters. It is very unlikely that James had ever talked with a person who believed that God would justify by faith without any works required. The tendency of the Jews was to say that God required works, but they often lacked faith.

"Then," you might ask, "Why does James make such a strong point of the argument?" James was trying to convince people to do that which they already knew was right and reasonable. He is not just trying to change the *conviction* of his readers . . . but their *action*. They already have faith, and this James recognizes. What they lack is the works to go with the faith. Not only do they need to trust Jesus (as they already do) but they need to *obey* Him. "Trust, and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey". This they knew, but this they were not doing.

How tragic today to realize that there are many sincere people who have been *taught* that a man is saved by faith without works. They *believe* that for God to expect a man to do as well as to believe is neither reasonable nor consistent with the logic of salvation by grace. (This is not meant to say that a man is saved by earning his salvation. Paul refutes this very effectively in more than one of his epistles. Earning salvation by works is impossible for any sinner. Obedience however, can be required as a condition of salvation without that obedience earning one ounce of the salvation gift. James and Paul are in perfect harmony here. (See the chart later in this chapter).

Verse 19 shows that James does not despise faith. He honors the Jewish confession that God is one (the "Shema"). This conviction that Jehovah is one God, and the only God, is the essential starting point in all revelation. "In the beginning God . . ." is the fundamental faith upon which further faith and action is built. This James recognizes. A man who believes this "doest well", but has not done that which is required. He has the basis upon which a saving commitment to Christ can be made. But without this surrender of both life and deed to Jesus, he has only made a start that accomplishes nothing

by itself. He is on his way, but if he goes no further, he is no better off than the demons.

Some may feel that James' "thou doest well" is a touch of the ironical. They may feel that such a man is only doing well if the demons are doing well, and that James is saying: "Fine, you are on about the same basis as the demons if you go no further." There could be a touch of irony here, but James is not belittling belief. The intellectual conviction of the truth is important, and basic. James is saying: Good, as far as it goes—but you haven't gone anywhere yet!"

"The demons believe and shudder". If there is anything odd about this, it is not that the demons believe. It is that man sometimes refuses to believe that which even the demons believe! The demons have the conviction that God is real and that His eternity of heaven and hell is real. Their conviction is so strong that they shudder at their destiny. This shuddering they do is similar to the bristling of an animal's hair when he is cornered and frightened because his life is in danger. When the demons contemplate Jesus, they bristle at the prospect of hell that looms before them. Men would do well to have such a conviction of the existence of God's heaven and hell!

What the devil (and demons) believe that makes them tremble is clearly outlined in John's vision. "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where are also the beast and false prophet; and they shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever". (Rev. 20:10) The false prophet should open his heart to the Word of God and know his destiny. The demons know!

The facts are so fundamental and basic in this God-created world that it takes many years of "brain washing" to convince young men and women that there is no God. Pupils often are exposed to these subtle suggestions (of there being no God) in their early school years, then during their teens in high school they often see scornful rejection of God on the face of many of their teachers. At the college level, the professor who believes in God is such a rarity that the pupil often is convinced that education and a belief in God are opposed to one another. In a world created by God, with the evidence of God in every leaf, every star, every thing that has been made (see Rom. 1:20-21), the student is brain-washed to blind himself to the evidence, is shamed into a denial of that which is obvious, is ridiculed openly, laughed at and scorned,

until he himself turns to join the professors in open scorn of those few students who yet dare to believe. Now walking with the scoffers, he takes his stand with them that he may one day sit in their "seat". (See Psalms 1:1) Yes, 2% of the world's population, the educated "elite", need to *come up to* the faith of the demons before they can go further. They need to become convinced of the reality of Jehovah and His eternity of heaven and hell. To believe this, they would do well; but still they would be no better than the demons if they should go no further than an intellectual acknowledgment of the facts.

It is not just "some" action that God requires as evidence of our faith. It is *obedience* He requires. To do without eating kidneys on Fridays (which one may not like to eat, anyway) is no evidence of a Godly faith. Fasting from kidneys is action and this action may be that by which *we* would choose to demonstrate our faith. This is just the point! It is *our* selfish choice of action that makes our faith void. It is our refusal to submit our will to God's that limits our faith to a dull intellectual conviction that prompts no action. Likewise the person who stubbornly refuses to obey God in any commandment is by this refusal making his faith dead. The *perfection* which God requires of us is supplied by Jesus Christ. But the *submission* He requires, we must do ourselves.

The demons who believe actually do something about their belief, but what they do does not come from a will surrendered to Christ. An example of demons acting on their faith is found in Luke 8:26-33. Here the demons who occupy a man cause the man to fall down before Jesus in a position of worship, and through the man's lips confess, so that all may hear, their conviction that this is Jesus, the son of God. (See also Mark 3). The demon's faith, even when coupled with confession of that faith, is pointless without the surrendered life. The person who by his deeds shows he wills to *obey* Jesus Christ, with faith in God and His promises, can expect the grace of salvation through the blood of Jesus.

"Wilt thou know?" Do you not see the point yet, says James? Do you desire proof? Do you yet wish to know? Faith without works is barren. Is the believer in "faith only" for justification yet willing to recognize and acknowledge the truth? There appears to be here a point of vexation against the man who still does not see that faith only does not offer salvation. Yet, James with a tenacious spirit is

ready to offer other arguments from the Scripture of the Old Testament to convince the most stubborn.

"Faith without works is barren" offers a subtle play upon words in the Greek. Barren (*aggos*) denotes idleness, or a lack of results because of lack of work. James is saying, "Faith without works doesn't work!" The absurdity of holding that a workless faith works explains further the note of exasperation in the question.

FAITH-ONLY DOES NOT JUSTIFY
(EXAMPLE NO. 2)

Text 2:21-24

- 2:21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?
22. Thou seest that faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect;
23. and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God.
24. Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith.

Queries

158. What is meant when it is said that Abraham was justified?
159. Why does the title "father" applied to Abraham have particular application to the argument?
160. How can it be said that Abraham completed the work, when God stopped him before he completed the sacrifice?
161. What is the similarity between this illustration and the one used in Romans 4:1ff.?
162. Why did James choose this particular obedience of Abraham to prove his working faith?
163. Just what was reckoned unto Abraham for righteousness?
164. How many similarities can you find between James 2:14-26 and Heb. 11?
165. How would you put "by works faith made perfect" in your own words?
166. Does "and he was called the friend of God" add anything to the argument? What?

167. Harmonize 2:24a with Gal. 2:16.
 168. Is James eliminating the importance of faith in v. 24?
 169. If Abraham's faith was reckoned unto him for righteousness, how can James conclude that we see clearly that the man was justified by works?

Paraphrases

- A. 2:21 Recall how the "father of the faithful", Abraham, was counted as if he were righteous when he *obeyed* in offering the life of his son upon the altar.
22. It is clearly evident that faith was built along with his works of obedience and not separate from them, and by these same works was his faith completed.
 23. The Scripture spoke accurately of that which happened when it said. "And Abraham believed God, and this obedient conviction was counted in God's sight as if he were righteous, being called the friend of God".
 24. And so it is, you see, that a man is counted as if he were righteous in God's sight by what he does as well as what he believes.
- B.*2:21 Don't you remember that even father Abraham was declared good because of what he *did*, when he was willing to obey God, even if it meant offering his son Isaac to die on the altar?
22. You see, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to; his faith was made complete by what he did, by his actions, his good deeds.
 23. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say, that Abraham trusted God, and the Lord declared him good in God's sight, and he was even called "The Friend of God".
 24. So you see, a man is saved by what he does, as well as by what he believes.

Summary

The example of Abraham agrees with the Old Testament teaching in showing that the obedience of a man is important in his justifica-

tion, even as his belief is important. When we separate faith from obedience, we destroy salvation.

Comment

"I believe I should, and someday I shall". If this had been Abraham's response to God's instruction about sacrificing his son, the story would have read quite differently. And yet today so many will declare that the moment a man accepts the proposition of God in his heart, that moment the man is saved. Obedience is today looked upon by many as an after-work, a result of salvation, that which comes after faith rather than that which builds faith. Many would rewrite this section of James to say: "The moment a man really believes, before he ever begins to obey, that moment God justifies him". Such a statement completely redefines the faith of the New Testament—an *obedient* faith in Jesus. Jesus asked the question as to which man is the better of the two—the man who believes but in the end refuses to obey, or the man who begins by denying but in the end he does obey. The chief priests and Jesus both affirmed that the man who began by denying, but ended by doing, was far better than the one who started with belief. All scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments affirm this in many ways.

The Holy Spirit, perhaps in anticipation that the book of Romans would be used as a proof text for a faith-only salvation theory, so inspired the writer that the book both begins and ends with the proposition that the *obedience of faith among all the nations* is the purpose of the apostolic revelation within the text. In the first chapter (1:6) Paul begins the argument with "Through whom (Jesus Christ) ye received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations, for his name's sake." In the last chapter (16:26), Paul concludes the entire epistle with the statement that the revelation of Jesus "is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith".

The book of Galatians is often used as a proof text for the faith-only doctrine. Yet all through the text Paul again affirms the important thing is the end product of doing, walking, working, living the faith in Jesus (as contrasted with the *meritorious works of the law* . . . 2:16). Paul says that the "life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith". Thus, righteousness is not through the earning power

of the deeds of the law, but through the grace of Christ which is ours when we *live in faith* (2:20-21).

In the Galatian text Paul also affirms that "as many as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ:" (3:27) that faith working through love" is what avails rather than the earning deeds of the law. (5:6); that the Galatians were hindered because they did "not obey the truth" (5:7); and that they should "walk by the spirit. ." that they "that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and the lusts thereof" (5:23); *and* "let each man prove his own work" (6:4) and "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" (6:7); so he concludes "So then, as we have opportunities, let us *work* that which is good toward all men, *and* especially toward them that are of the household of the faith". (6:10).

Abraham was *justified*, i.e., he was pronounced righteous. The word does not imply that Abraham was always just in the sight of God, without sin; but rather that at one time he stood in need of being justified; that once he was unjust and then became just in God's sight. "Was justified" implies that he passed from the state of non-justification to the state of justification. The word is also quite clear (this being the main point of the book of Galatians), that once a man becomes unjustified, he cannot justify himself; once having sinned, the wage is death and must be paid. A man cannot justify himself by earning justification with good works. The justification must be by the grace of God with Jesus paying the penalty. So Abraham was justified by the grace of God through Jesus Christ! yet *when did this justification apply?* During Abraham's life, you may reply; but *when* during his life? Did not God require of Abraham both belief and obedience? Does not the Scripture clearly affirm that he was justified *when he obeyed?* So it is, that to affirm "I believe, I am justified because I believe and someday I shall obey", is to completely warp and twist the very teaching of God's revelation.

Note how the hypothetical case of verse 16 proves the same point as the historical case of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in v. 22. James is not contrasting faith and works, but rather showing how works complete faith, and how faith without the works is so incomplete as to be ineffectual.

The "perfecting" of faith by works (v. 22) again emphasizes the beautiful relationship between them. The culmination of faith is obedient works. Faith without works is much like parents without

children, unsatisfied, fruitless, void of its function. Faith leads us on, but we travel the journey only by works. To have faith without works would be like being led, yet not going anywhere. The wise men saw the star in the east and believed in its purpose. This may be likened unto faith. The wise men were led by the star and actually travelled to see King Jesus. This travelling may be likened unto works. Faith without works would not have taken them to King Jesus. Both were necessary!

Note how both Romans 4:1 ff. and James 2:21 affirm that Abraham was justified, or saved. Both are using the same illustration, but answering a different problem. Paul, in Roman 4, is arguing against the Jew who depends upon his obedience of the law to earn him heaven. James is arguing against the careless Christian who is depending upon a faith in Jesus that is not working. Neither one is justified. The Jew (of Romans) is not justified because he is not under the blood of Christ, and no man can earn salvation. The "Christian" (?) is not justified because his faith is incomplete, and does not take him to Christ. The Christian who is justified will go where He sends and do what He commands. His faith is a going and doing faith. It is a working faith. This is the only faith that will take a person to Jesus.

Another New Testament location of Abraham, Isaac and Rahab illustrations of faith is found in Hebrews 11. Here Paul argues that the fruit of faith is works, and that only faith can produce these works. This is similar to the argument in James 2:14-26 where James shows that works complete faith. The obedience of Abraham in sacrificing his son appears to be a supreme example of the obedient faith, being a shadow of the obedience of Christ in sacrificing His life for us. (Rom. 5:19).

The point is clear that it is not Abraham's conviction that was "reckoned unto him for righteousness" (counted as if he were righteous), but rather his active faith—his obedience in faith, or his righteous acts that was a result of his faith. (see Psalm 106:30,31; Gen. 15:6; Deut. 24:13; 6:25; Prov. 27:14). Furthermore, the use of the expression "reckoned unto him" makes it clear that this obedient action did not merit his righteousness. Rather his action demonstrated a faith that God counted as if he were righteous. Even as all men have sinned, so did Abraham; and the scripture is bold to record his sin. Abraham, fearing for his life, instructed his wife to lie regarding her marital relationship to Abraham. For this

Abraham was expelled from the country, being forced to take gifts from the heathen Pharaoh as he went. (Gen. 12:11-20). On another occasion Abraham repeated the same sin before Abimelech, king of Gerar (Gen. 20), and the father's example led the son into the same sin (Gen. 26:7 ff.).

Yet, in spite of his sin, Abraham's willingness to obey God out of faith in His promises was counted as if Abraham were righteous: "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:7ff; James 2:23.) This substitution of an obedient faith for absolute righteousness becomes possible through the wage of sin being paid by the blood of Christ, and was applied in Abraham's case through the promise given unto him of the Messiah to come.

The verb "reckoned" has the force of crediting something to one's account which does not actually belong to him (Psalms 31:2). The verb may also provide manner of expressing the same, "counted as if it were equivalent to, thus having the same force and weight as something mentioned". Thus, God counts the faithful obedient life as a whole as approved as if the individual acts themselves were all righteous. (See p. 22, *Ropes*, on James).

How grateful we should be to God that we, who are so unworthy, could be counted as if we were righteous. That, even as Abraham, our obedient faith may be reckoned unto us as if we were righteous. Not receiving that which we really merit: hell itself, we receive that which we do not, and now cannot, merit: heaven. Such a love for us is pure grace, for we can in no way earn nor merit it. That we through a disobedient life should reject such an undeserving gift is unthinkable. Yet men do just that, perhaps in ignorance, or through self-deception arising out of a desire to continue in sin. God help us to speak with all persuasion and conviction as we attempt to lead others to accept the free gift of God's salvation, and become "friends of God".

The grand conclusion in verse 24 seems amply proved. There seems to be no need for further examples. He does not now say, "But wilt thou know.." (v. 20), but now "Ye see.." The evidence has been overwhelming. Works complete faith, and faith without its completion in works is dead, bringing no salvation, no results, fulfilling no purpose. A man is justified "not only by faith," clearly meaning here the "faith without works" he has been discussing so repeatedly.

"Faith only" is a bone of contention among religious groups. Anticipating such a dangerous religious philosophy (that a man is saved by what he believes without the necessary obedient action) the Holy Spirit has here revealed the will of God so clearly that it may be said, "Ye see.." Yet a man's desire not to see, or not to believe, can still blind him, and being self-deceived, he cannot (or will not) see the truth. "Seeing, they see not". A desire not to obey the Lord creates a desire not to believe the Lord's teaching regarding obedience in faith. And the desire not to believe can blind a man as effectively as if he had no possibility of spiritual sight. Tragedy of tragedies that the point is made so clear that all men can see, yet men choose not to see!

FAITH MUST HAVE WORKS
(EXAMPLE NO. 3)

Text 2:25-26

- 2:25 And in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by her works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way?
26. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.

Queries

170. Of what nationality or from what people was Rahab?
171. Why do you think James used her for an example when there were so many examples from Israel he could have used? (As in Hebrews 11.)
172. Rahab was so positively identified as a "law breaker" (adultery and fornication are strictly forbidden in the law of Moses), how could it be said that she was "justified by works?"
173. Do you think this justifies Rahab's lying to the soldiers who were searching for the spies hidden on her roof-top? (The account is in Joshua 2).
174. What does Heb. 11:31 say about the reason for Rahab's being spared?

175. How many times in this section (verses 14-26) has James repeated the thought that faith apart from works is dead?
 176. What is the meaning of "dead?"

Paraphrases

- A. 2:25 In the same way Rahab, whose very occupation broke the law, was saved because she acted upon her faith by hiding the spies and telling them how to escape.
 26. For just as the body is dead when it has no spirit, in the same way faith is dead when it has no works.
- B.*2:25 Rahab, the wicked woman, is another example of this. She was saved because of what she did when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.
 26. Just as the body is dead when there is no spirit in it, so faith is dead if it is not the kind that results in good deeds.

Summary

Rahab, the harlot, was a sinner, yet when she acted upon her faith she was justified; so faith must be coupled with action for justification.

Comment

Every person of every race upon the earth, of every sex; yes, and of every occupation and condition of life may find justification upon the principle of faith herein described. True, the occupation may of necessity be changed, and most certainly the condition of life may be changed by salvation—but the point is that *every* person may be justified if he so chooses.

Rahab was a Canaanite, a woman whose very occupation was a continual violation of one of the ten commandments, under the full weight of sin. Her sinful state would not be questioned by anyone with the remotest understanding of God's revelation. The fact that she is here chosen as a case in point has at least two reasons.

First, her sinful state. The fact that man does not and cannot earn his way into heaven seems most evident in this particular example.

It seems that some people would prefer to grade sins as they would grade a paper in school. The A- sins are very mild; while the B+, while still acceptable, are not quite so good. Perhaps here some would like to call them "white lies". Most certainly many people would like to grade their sins between C and A, mostly "not so good", but passing! The "F" sins would include the ones committed by the other fellow, or the ones not continued by the person. The "grading" of sins is completely foreign to God's revelation. *All sins are F! There are no passable sins. . .*

When a person realizes his own sins are condemning—really "F" grade, and he (with his sins) is completely unacceptable to God, then his salvation by works doctrine becomes completely inadequate. In despair he realizes that nothing he can do will earn salvation. He is absolutely incapable of undoing his sinful state. Rahab was an "F" grade sinner, as is every person. Of her state there is no doubt. *Yet she found justification.*

How many people in torment, filled with guilt complexes, knowing they do not deserve heaven, could find joy through justification in Christ Jesus! The fact that Rahab was justified, and her working faith was counted as if she were righteous, should give us hope too. We are justified by works, as James puts it, not by earning our salvation; but by the mercy of God, who counts a faith that works obedience in us as if we were righteous. Rahab's example is an argument for a faith completed by works, and against salvation by "deserving" works (i.e. the works of law).

Not only does James emphasize the works of Rahab in connection with her justification, but the details of her working conviction in God are clearly stated in the account of the Old Testament, (Joshua 2 and 6:23). Paul declares "By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace." Thus Paul (assuming he wrote the Hebrew epistle) agrees with James. Her faith worked with, helped her works; and her faith was perfected by what she did; and she was justified because of that perfected (completed) faith.

The entire discourse is concluded with a final argument, an illustration. In repetition once again, he affirms that "faith apart from works is dead", adding this to the conclusion in v. 24.

The illustration regarding body and spirit might not be put together in the expected manner. One might expect that the body and works should be partners, and that faith and spirit would be

the counterparts. However, James joins the body with spirit, and faith with works. Through such an unusual statement, James emphasizes his point with all the more force. Even as the spirit is the quickening force that gives life to the body, so works is the perfecting force that gives life to faith. As the body has no fruit without spirit, so faith has no fruit without works. The simple, beautiful, and powerful illustration concludes his discourse on the great principle. It has been affirmed seven times within twelve verses. (2:14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26.)

Repetition has always been a means of emphasis and memory. It is extremely difficult to read this passage and miss the point! The sinner who reads the passage is not content to ask, "What must I believe to be saved," but as on the day of Pentecost must ask, "What must we *do*?" (Acts 2:37). The Christian who reads is forced to the conclusion that a genuine life of obedience and surrender of action to the will of Christ is necessary for his justification by grace. This, of course, is applicable in all fields: in morality, in work, in recreation, in worship. Instead of affirming in typical faith-only fashion, "for me to believe is Christ," let us affirm with the apostle Paul, "for me to *live* is Christ!" (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20).

SERMON OUTLINE

THE DEVIL'S FAITH James 2:14-26

Introduction: John 3:16, the heart of the N.T. What does it mean? (Instead of looking for the answer in the theology of man, let us search the Scripture for God's explanation!)

Proposition: The devil has faith, he believes that Jesus is the Christ. Yet the devil's faith is not coupled with obedience. Will such a faith save him?
NO! James 2:14.

God's illustration: 2:15-16 (faith without works will not feed nor save).

Propositional question: "WHY NOT?"

I. v. 17 The devil's faith is *alone*.

i.e. the devil deceives by separating the word of God . . .

thus using only *part* of it.

He did so with Adam and Eve.

He did so with the temptation of Jesus.

He does so in separating John 3:16 from James 2.

II. v. 18 Godly faith is not alone, but *with works*.

III. v. 19 Devil's faith makes him TREMBLE.

Why? He knows his destiny. (Rev. 20:10).

He believes in Jesus (Luke 8:26-33).

IV. v. 20 Devil's faith is *dead*.

V. v. 21-23 God's illustration about Abraham. (His obedience was necessary).

VI. v. 24 *Faith only* is the devil's faith, and is deceptive.

VII. v. 26 Works are to faith what the spirit is to the body.

Conclusion: As the spirit is necessary to give the body physical life, so works are necessary to give faith spiritual life.

THREE-POINT SERMON STARTERS

PROFIT IN CHRIST 2:14

1. Begins with faith.
2. Completed in works.
3. Results in Salvation.

BELIEVING IN DEMONS 2:19

1. They do believe (Luke 8:26ff; Mk. 3:7ff).
2. They shudder because they only believe. Luke 8:28b; Rev. 20:10.
3. We do well to also believe and couple this with works.

HOW ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED 2:23

1. He believed God enough to obey.
2. His obedient faith was counted as righteousness.
3. He was called the friend of God.

RAHAB HAD IT 2:25

1. Rahab had sin.
2. Rahab had believing works.
3. Rahab had justification.

DEATH 2:26

1. Death is apartness.
2. Physical death is separation of body and spirit.
3. Spiritual death is separation of faith and works.

(God and man)

SPECIAL STUDY

"WORKS"

WORKS THAT "EARN"! This kind of works emphasizes justice. It is concerned with wages deserved—with payment that is due. Righteousness that is absolute righteousness is a state of God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect" (Deut. 32:4) "For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). If we are absolutely righteous—without sin—then we have earned the right to be with God forevermore. Heaven is ours by right fellowship with God; it is not a matter of grace but a rightful place for a righteous man in God's image. *But no man has earned such a right!* "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isa. 53:6). "For we are all become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousness are as a polluted garment: and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities like the wind, take us away." (Isa. 64:6). "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (I John 1:8).

Sinfulness is the state resulting from having committed a sin—*any* sin—one sin is enough. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou dost not commit adultery, but killest, thou art become a transgressor of the law." (Jas. 2:10, 11). "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone who continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them." (Gal. 3:10). Having committed one sin we have earned the wages of a sinner; DEATH—"Be not deceived my beloved brethren." (Jas. 1:16). "For the wages of sin is

death: but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23).

If I insist on being treated *justly*—that I “get what is coming to me”—then I should realize I am really asking for death and hell. This is the wage I, a sinner, have earned! Throughout the New Testament the point is made clear that we cannot earn heaven if we have committed a single sin. The books of Romans and Galatians are particular in pointing out the futility of demanding wages we have earned. These wages are often referred to as “the works of the law.” “Because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:20). “Yet knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed on Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” (Gal. 2:16). “For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works that no man should glory.” (Eph. 2:8, 9).

Works that “perform”. When reference is made to works in this sense, the emphasis is upon active participation. In this sense, I am admonished to have a love and devotion so strong that I give of myself. I must surrender so completely as to include my body as well as my heart. This “works that perform,” refers to action, as well as confession and profession. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service. And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Rom. 12:1, 2).

Works, in this sense, emphasizes complete Faith—a complete devotion—a complete surrender. This is the “perfection” (completeness) the Scripture continually demands of us. God does not want us to view our work as a flawless action done with a purpose of earning but rather a complete surrender that includes my way of life as well as my devotion. The blood of Christ makes me as though I had not sinned, and God does this because I have surrendered completely. This includes my body—its deeds—my very

life. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21). "Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith." (Jas. 2:24). "If ye know that he is righteous, ye knoweth that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of him." (I John 2:29).