

August 16, 2020

“Hearing and Doing”
Lesson 3 of Unit

James 2:14-26

Intro

The issue of faith vs. works is one that many Christians struggle with. It bothered Martin Luther, too. He read in Paul’s epistles that we are saved by faith in Christ alone. But the Catholic Church countered Luther’s concerns with James, which speaks of works. So this issue is an old one, and therefore one we need to study and consider to arrive at the truth of what God says about these two.

Both Matthew 25:31-46 and Rev. 20:12-13 speak of people being judged based on their works. It’s helpful to remember context here as well. One of the themes James’ letter addresses repeatedly is the economic reality of the poor in his world. The first half of chapter 2 (vs. 1-13) warns against discriminating against the poor in favor of the rich. The passage we study today immediately follows.

Read James 2:14-26

1. What does “faith” mean as James uses the word in vs. 14? What does “faith” mean in its larger overall definition?
2. Verses 15-16 show an example from James’ day that still exists today. What is the attitude being shown by the hypothetical person speaking in vs. 16? What is this person avoiding that James implies a genuine Christian shouldn’t?
3. What do the following verses say about what a person gives and how they give it? What other verses do you know that apply to this question? Acts 4:32-35; Acts 6:1-6; 2 Thess. 3:10-12; 1 Tim. 5:3-16; I John 3:17-18)
4. In vs. 17, James concludes that faith without action is dead faith. What questions can Christians ask themselves that would indicate whether their faith was dead or dying? Which types of questions are more useful: those that deal with acts of omission (things not done), or those that deal with acts of commission (things that have been done)?

5. Verse 18 presents a hypothetical argument that faith and works are separate elements. In what way are the two different? Why can't they be separated?

6. In the first part of vs. 19, James is referring to the Shema (see Deut. 6:4). What point is he making by comparing those who claim faith without works is enough with demons?

7. Note on vs. 21 from our text: "Behind the uselessness or emptiness of those who cling to a deedless faith lies the attempt to think that God accepts people merely on the basis that they acknowledge his existence. Were that the case, then logic would dictate that demons would be saved!"

8. James uses the next four verses (21-24) in reminding his Jewish Christian readers of Abraham's actions which prove his faith. Find phrases in each of these verses that show Abraham's faith through his actions.

9. In vs. 25, how is Rahab described? What actions of hers does James note? What made Rahab righteous to God? How should this example encourage us in our walk with God?

10. What is the analogy James develops in vs. 26? Using your own words, what is James saying about faith and works in this entire passage (vs. 14-26)?

Application: Faith to the Christian means something different than it does to the world in general. To many, faith means intellectually understanding that God exists. But James teaches that faith in God must lead to actions to be considered faith. The two are inseparable. Abraham and Rahab showed their faith in God by the things they did. We understand that we can't and don't earn salvation by any works that we do. But unless our faith produces works that show a life changing to become more like Jesus, then our "belief" in God is worthless.

Prayer: Father God, we don't want to be a people who just believes in You. We want to be people changed by You in the way we live, so that others will see by our words and our actions that You are real. Help us again this week to actively live our faith in all we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.