

Commentary.James 2.14-18

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Scripture

¹⁴ What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

¹⁵If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? ¹⁷Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Commentary

James now turns our spiritual health, a self-examination in order to proof our true Salvation in a reliance upon Jesus. He sets out to challenge us in examining ourselves for the evidence of Salvation by contrasting the false proofs resting on faith alone without either works or works alone without faith, vs. the proper doctrine of both of them coexisting as the result of a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

So James asks: what good is a faith that is not bearing fruit? **‘What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works’?** He can ask this because

any faith in the Savior has to be the same faith from God, through a relationship with His Son. And therefore, if there is a relationship with His Son, then that relationship with Him must produce nothing less than an outpouring in response. **(John 7:37-38)** So then, if there is not fruit being borne out of a faith, then what good can it be, for it cannot be the type from God which would inherently produce those fruits. And therefore, if it is not of God and thus not in Jesus, then how can that faith save him? **'Can faith save him?'**

James gives his example in v 15 - **'If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food'**. These people are not noted as asking for help, though they are known of and acknowledged. They are in a most terrible state, both humiliated and in danger of losing their lives for a lack of necessities. They are in a very severe need of charity, and we see them and recognize their situation clearly. **(Lev 25:35)**

And so, in dealing with them, **'one of (us)'**, people of the God of compassion, offers a token of faithful love and comfort in a kind blessing - **'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled'** - as they are sent away empty handed. Yet, **'(we) do not give them the things which are needed for the body'**, that which they will need in basic necessity to survive. In light of the preceding verse (**v 14**), he again asks, what good is this sort of faith? This faith, in failing to produce works helpful in the most basic of ways, nor in the compassion of a heart found in one of God, has betrayed itself as hollow and of no value. **'Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.'** This is the litmus test of any faith; the tree is known by it's fruit, and the value of the works judged by God's Measure will reflect the state of faith in the bearer's life. **(Matt 7:24-27)** Under the demand of our new spirit we are

called to rise to action, and only the faith which God grants us can produce truly good works. All other faiths are dead.

For the sake of illustration, James offers someone's declaration of the validity of his works, in contrast to James' faith - **'But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works."**' James now puts it to the test in light of the

overall point he is expounding - **'Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'**

As his intent in this block of passage has been to cause us to examine ourselves for the saving faith in Jesus, from God alone, and to do so by considering the coexistence of faith and works, he is able to show this person's flawed logic and cause him to even question if he in fact stands Justified. This person might still be looking to works as Saul once did in trying to save himself. Our Salvation requires a total abandonment of

ourselves, our devices, and our attempts at self-saving works, in exchange for a total reliance upon the Promise of Jesus to Save us from Judgment and damnation through faith in His Father's Grace.

James acknowledges his works, but shows that the basis of Salvation is Grace through faith. Therefore, this person's works can be present without faith and thus prove worthless at the Judgment. The manifestation of both a saving faith,

something only we and our Lord can ultimately examine in ourselves, in combination with good works borne out of a gratitude and love resultant of such a faith and relationship, can hope to prove to us our sure standing in

Christ. And if one, in examining his faith, were to find it in question or deficient, his only obvious recourse must be to throw himself at the foot of the Cross and cry for Mercy in Jesus'

Salvation. **(2 Corinthians 7:9-10)** And if so, our Lord promises to Save all those who call on His Name in this way. **(Rom**

10:13) Therefore, the person of

v 18 can only show works which may or may not be an outpouring in response of

saving faith, and so cannot defeat James' logic nor prove to himself he is Saved. And as a reference point, a countermeasure, James shows that his argument is correctly in alignment with this doctrine by pointing to the truth made evident through a life like his, which had the marks of one saved - '**and I will show you my faith by my works**'.

Key

Summary

We must be diligent in self examination so as to be sure we aren't deceived concerning our motives and Salvation. A bitter Day at Judgment awaits those who relied on anything but the Blood and Forgiveness of our Lord, the Final and Only Atonement. James gives us the means to identify the truth of our faith and test ourselves in it through the response of works.

Cited Scripture

John

7:37-38

³⁷ On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

³⁸ He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Leviticus

25:35

³⁵ "If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.

Matthew

7:24-27

²⁴ “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:²⁵ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

²⁶ “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:²⁷ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

2

Corinthians 7:9-10

⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. ¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Romans

10:13

¹³ For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”