

REAL FAITH IN THE REAL WORLD

Practical Wisdom From the Book of James

SMALL GROUP LESSON 4

James 2:14-26

Read this introduction to this section of James, written by Chuck Swindoll:

"This section is the main thesis of the book. Everything before this passage is like an arrow pointing forward to it. Everything after is like an arrow pointing back. It's the apex of a pyramid in James's mind. He asks two rhetorical questions, not expecting an answer but about to give one: "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" James's question is like asking, "What good is it to carry around a driver's license if you can't actually drive?" People may be called Christians and claim to be part of the faith, but do they have any genuine results that prove to those around them that their confession is authentic? That's what James is asking. And quite frankly, James says that if somebody claims to have faith in Christ but his or her life doesn't show results of faith, that faith might very well be phony."

James 2:14-26

Read James 2:14-26 together

Now read Mathew 21:28-32

Question: How does this parable from Jesus relate to what James teaches in the passage you read above?

Some people think that this passage from James, especially James 2:24, implies that you need to do good works to be saved. They contrast James' words with the Apostle Paul who seems to emphasize faith and grace more than works.

Here are several passages written by the Apostle Paul. Read them and write next to them whether they emphasize faith or works or both?

- Ephesian 2:8-10 -
- Romans 3:28 -
- Ephesians 4:1-3 -
- Ephesians 4:20-32 -
- Romans 5:1,2 -

Also read this verse on faith and works from the Apostle John: 1 John 3:17-18 -

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Question: Given these passages, do you think Paul and John and James are in conflict with one another?

Question: Do we need to do good works to be saved?

Question: In your own words, how would you describe the relationship between faith and works in a Christian's life?

William Barclay, in his commentary on James puts it this way.

... James and Paul ... begin at different times in the Christian life. Paul begins at the very beginning. He insists that no one can ever earn the forgiveness of God. The initial step must come from the free grace of God; we can only accept the forgiveness which God offers us in Jesus Christ. James begins much later with the professing Christians, those who claim to be already forgiven and in a new relationship with God. Such people, James rightly says, must live new lives, for they are new creatures. They have been justified; they must now show that they are sanctified. With that, Paul would have entirely agreed.

The Application of Faith and Works – Are we doing it?

Question: What are some reasons we might, even as Christians, walk away from someone in need?

Question: What are some of the good works that we should be seeing coming out of our church or our families?

Question: If we don't see good works coming from someone's life, should we assume they don't really know God?

Question: Are there particular good works that you sense God is calling you to?

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Living by the Spirit

In the sermon on this passage, we were reminded that we cannot do these good works on our own, but we need the Holy Spirit to fill us, heal us, and empower us so that we can do the works that God has prepared for us to do.

Read together Romans 8:1-13.

Question: How might “living by the flesh” or “being in the realm of the flesh” relate to what James warns us about having “faith without works?”

Question: How does the Holy Spirit help us to live the way James is teaching?

Question: What are some things that could get in the way of our allowing the Spirit to work through us in this way?

FOR PRAYER

Possible areas to ask for prayer:

- Ask God to show you if there are any practical needs around you that He is asking you to provide for.
- Pray for each person – pray that the Holy Spirit would do such a work inside them that good works and obedience to God would bubble out of them, pouring out of the overflow of God’s work in their lives.