

Lesson Text

James 2:14-16 (NIV)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.

¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Today’s Lesson Aims

- **Learning Fact:** To summarize the relationship between faith and works.
- **Biblical Principle:** To explain why obedience is a necessary component to a life of faith.
- **Daily Application:** To identify areas in one’s life where actions do not follow faith and make a plan for change.

Power Hour
Lesson
Summary for
February 4,
2018

**“Faith
Without
Works is
Dead”**

Lesson Text:
James 2:14-26

Background
Scripture:
James 2:14-26

Devotional
Reading:
Psalm 143



Introduction

Flipping and Flopping

When politicians change their positions on a topic, opponents are quick to deride the change as being a *flip-flop*. This derogatory label is not new, being traced back to the 1880s.

The issue at hand was U. S. President Grover Cleveland's compromise with the United Kingdom on fishing rights in the waters off Canada. This signaled a change in promised policy and outraged New England states that depended on the fishing industry.

A fallout of this political concession was a *New York Tribune* writer's calling of President Cleveland's action a "fisheries flip-flop." The phrase was probably a play on words in bringing to mind the way fish flip and flop on a boat deck. The phrase caught on, and since that time the flip-flopping charge has been made against countless leaders.

People know that talk is cheap and that actions speak louder than words. People are suspicious of those who say one thing today, but act in another way tomorrow. James has quite a bit to say about ensuring that professions of faith are matched by accompanying action consistently.

Lesson Background

Time: about A.D. 45

Place: Jerusalem

The author identifies himself as James, "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1). This clearly makes him a Christian leader, but which of the several men named James in the early church is he?

Two of the original 12 apostles of Jesus are named James. The James who was the brother of John was murdered by Herod quite early in the history of the church, too early for him to have been the author of our book (Matthew 10:2; Acts 12:1, 2). The other James, the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3), is a possibility, but his lack of mention in the New Testament aside from lists of the 12 apostles makes him unlikely as the author of the book under consideration.

Most likely is the James who was a son of Mary and Joseph, thus a half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3). While this James did not believe in Jesus during his ministry (John 7:5), he did become a believer after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:14). Paul records that Jesus made a special appearance to James after the resurrection, a person carefully distinguished from the 12 apostles in description (1 Corinthians 15:5-7). James was a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church in its early days (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19).

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Based on the fact that the letter is addressed to “the twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (James 1:1), the intended audience is Christians of Jewish background. If “scattered among the nations” refers to the scattering of Stephen’s martyrdom, then the intended recipients are in Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1) as well as Phenice (Phoenicia), Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch (11:19). If “scattered among the nations” is not linked to that persecution, then the intended recipients may live in the farther environs of the Roman Empire (John 7:35).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus records that this James was martyred in the early A.D. 60s. Therefore we date the book to no later than A.D. 62. The combination of addressees, date, and content reflects the mid-first-century concerns of Jewish Christians who grappled with the place of the beloved Law of Moses in their lives. James, a Jewish Christian himself, was not afraid to teach that keeping the law is a good thing in certain circumstances (see James 2:8).

The tendency to try earning God’s favor through keeping the law still held much appeal to Christians from a Jewish background. But Jesus, Paul, and others had shown that salvation could not be earned. Therefore, the place of obedience to God’s commands was perplexing. Was there a place for good deeds (or works) that did not fall back into the Jewish system of keeping the old covenant law to please God? This is the issue that James addressed; it is an issue that resonates yet today.

What Do You Think?

- What questions could we ask ourselves that would reveal dead or dying faith in our lives?
- How do we commit to doing good works as a visible example to others without slipping into legalism or pride?
- How can an analysis of sin serve as a diagnostic tool of a person’s relationship with God?
- What are some ways to resist becoming weary (Galatians 6:9) in helping others?

Points to Ponder

- Claims of faith without evidence of good works are dead and empty (James 2:14-20).
- Our behavior and the way we live are evidence of our faith in the Lord God (vs. 21-25).
- As a breathless body emits no indication of life, so fruitless faith exhibits nothing more than hypocrisy (v. 26).

Conclusion

True saving faith leads to action. Dynamic faith is not intellectual contemplation or emotional consternation; it leads to obedience on the part of the will. And this obedience is not an isolated event: it continues throughout the whole life. It leads to works.



Prayer

Heavenly Father, we truly believe You are the one and only God. May this belief be much more than words. You proved faithful by Your actions; may we do so as well. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thought to Remember

Faith's fitness requires exercise.

Anticipating the Next Lesson

Next week's lesson is **"A Disciplined Faith,"** and summarizes the figurative language that the Apostle James uses to describe the urgency and importance of our speech. Study James 3:1-12.

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