

TRUST AND OBEY

James 2:14-26

INTRODUCTION

- A. "I love you more than life itself," the young man said to his girlfriend. "For you I'd climb the highest mountain, I'd swim the deepest ocean . . . and I'll be over Friday night if it doesn't rain."
- B. Any woman will tell you that a man who *says* he loves you isn't nearly so desirable as a man who *shows* he loves you.
 - 1. All the professions of love in the world don't amount to anything if words aren't supported by deeds.
 - 2. In fact, most of us judge how much someone loves us not by what they tell us about their feelings but by the way they treat us.
- C. While we've learned this lesson in our personal lives, many people still struggle with a similar issue in their religious lives. According to much of the religious world today, God is more interested in what we say about him than in what we do for him.
 - 1. Just say you believe and you will be saved. Just pray the "Sinners' Prayer" or put your hand on the T.V. Just accept Jesus into your heart. "*We are saved by faith only*," this crowd will cry, and they cringe at the suggestion that anything more may be required of the Christian.
 - 2. Discipleship, righteous living, yielding to the Lordship of Jesus – all become so much optional equipment to their one and only essential: a disembodied "faith."
- D. Why is it so difficult for us to accept that God is at least as smart as a girlfriend or wife? He knows that the person who claims to believe is not nearly so desirable as the one who shows his faith through the way he behaves. "Actions speak louder than words" both in romance and in religion.

I. THE BATTLE BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS.

A. The False Division.

- 1. Paul and James.
 - a. Paul - in Galatians and Romans - argues for justification by faith apart from works of the law. We cannot earn our way into heaven by what we do. Our best shot is but "filthy rags" in God's eyes, Isa. 64:6
 - b. James argues for justification on the basis of faith that is evidenced by what we do. Faith alone, he will say, is not able to save us, Jas. 2:14-26.
- 2. Faith and Works - Misunderstanding both Paul and James
 - a. **Faith** becomes a purely internal condition of the heart, a cognitive and passive acceptance.
 - b. **Works** becomes mere external activity, having no connection to or comment on the heart.

B. The True Unity

- 1. Faith and works are understood (Biblically) to be a unit. They work together to complement and complete each other.
- 2. Examples:
 - a. In the Old Testament
 - i. **Hebrews 11:1** - Faith is being sure enough to act.

- ii. **Hebrews 11:4, 7, 8, 17, 23, 29-34**
- iii. Faith was always backed up by action. Without the action, would the faith have mattered?
- b. In the teachings of Jesus: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 7:21).*
- c. In Paul:
 - i. **Romans 1:5; 16:25-27**
 - ii. **Galatians 5:6; 6:9-10**

II. FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD. James 2:14-26

A. The Issue – vss. 14-17

1. Faith without deeds is powerless to save (vs 14)
 - a. **Jas. 2:17, 20, 24, 26**
 - b. Such faith is "without worth"
2. An Analogy (vss. 15-17)
 - a. We all recognize that love must be expressed.
 - i. Words of love and compassion are not enough.
 - ii. Some action is required to back up the words.
 - iii. No action, no love.
 - b. In the same way - no action, no faith.
3. James is familiar with the kind of Christian who is uncomfortable being asked to prove his faith by his life. James insists that Christians must "put up or shut up."

B. The Argument – vss. 18-19

1. The answer to that kind of Christian:
 - a. The "someone" in vs 18 is answering the "someone" in vs 14. He agrees with the position James takes.
 - b. The quotation does not end in the middle of vs 18 but continues on to the end of the verse, or even vs 19.
2. Works is the only way to prove faith exists.
 - a. The fruit principle allows the one who acts right to show that he believes right.
 - b. What principle allows someone to prove faith in the absence of behavior?
3. Faith is not just acknowledging that God exists.
 - a. A mere intellectual assent will not save.
 - b. The demons can give that, but such "faith" leads to fear rather than salvation.

C. The Examples – vss. 20-26

1. James goes on to give two examples of how faith without deeds is useless.
 - a. Abraham and Rahab
 - b. He calls the "faith only" Christian an "empty-head."
 - c. The real question here is actually "What would the outcomes of these situations have been without the *actions* of Abraham and Rahab?"
2. Abraham offers Isaac (**James 2:21-24**).
 - a. When God told Abraham to offer Isaac, Abraham obeyed.
 - i. "His faith and his actions were working together"
 - ii. "His faith was made complete by what he did"

- iii. Because he was *willing to act*, the scripture could truly state that "Abraham *believed* God ..."
 - b. What if Abraham had not done what God said?
 - i. He could still believe in God, yet choose to disobey him.
 - ii. But would that kind of faith justify him?
 - iii. Without obedience, the scripture could not have stated that "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."
 - c. Abraham was justified not just because he said the right words but because he did the right thing. We are justified by faith expressing itself through works. It is not faith plus works but faith at work that is the kind of faith pleasing to God.
- 3. Rahab saves the spies (**James 2:25-26**).
 - a. Rahab protected the spies and, as a result, was saved when the Israelites took Jericho.
 - b. But what if Rahab had turned the spies in?
 - i. She could still have believed in the power of the God of the Israelites without choosing to risk her own life to save those of the spies.
 - ii. But would that kind of faith have saved her?
 - c. Rahab showed that she had a living faith when she risked her own life in behalf of God's people. Without the risk, there would have been no saving Rahab in the destruction which followed.

CLOSING

- A. Many of us live a "faith only" theology.
 - 1. We count on confession to justify us [Thomas!].
 - 2. What about discipleship? What about commitment?
- B. Many of us look to the wrong kind of deeds as evidence of faith.
 - 1. Church attendance is not the ultimate expression of faith.
 - 2. Abraham and Rahab were not commended for observing ceremony or agreeing to a statement of beliefs – they were commended for *taking risks*.
 - a. Abraham risked his future.
 - b. Rahab risked her life.
- C. True faith must and will express itself through works.