

Faith That Works Part 2

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and 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? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But 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. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14-20)

In our beginning study of this passage, we devoted our meditation to knowing more and understanding more about this blessed relationship of "faith" and "trust" that we share with the Lord Jesus. And while the depth of meaning of that relationship is far beyond our natural ability to fully grasp it, I am confident, that each time you and I "reach" to God for more understanding, as our loving Father, He will gladly give it to us. And so, we do that today.

And as we begin, may we remind ourselves of a truth that we accepted in our earlier study of these words, that God Himself really is the only real source of "biblical faith". "True Biblical Faith" cannot come into our souls by any other means. Nor are we able, as some want to believe, to "summons it up" from within our own souls through some personal effort.

Oh, how I do grieve for so many of our brethren who believe so strongly that their faith is something that they must, by their own efforts, develop and maintain, suffering unnecessarily with the misunderstanding that "if only their faith could be stronger, their hopes and prayers would be answered differently".

And yes, their beliefs are "close to being the truth", close, but yet so far, far away, leaving them with a "guilt-ridden" conscience, blaming themselves for unfulfilled hopes and "unanswered prayers". No, my dear friends, "faith" does not come to us by the strength of our own efforts, no matter how hard

we might try. "Faith", real "biblical faith" can come to us only as a "gift" from our loving Heavenly Father.

Turn with me for a moment to Ephesians 2:8-9, and let's remind ourselves again of exactly what God is saying to us there about "faith". Those familiar words,

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

Too often, so many of our Christian brethren misunderstand these words and fail to grasp their full meaning. Look with me closely for a moment here at verse 8. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." In these words, the direct antecedent to the word "gift" is the word "faith". In other words, the word "gift" refers specifically to the word "faith", meaning that our salvation comes to us by "God's grace" through His "gift of faith".

And these words, "this is not of your own doing, it is the gift of God", are so very clear. In other words, no matter how much we might want to "summon up" faith from within our own soul, it cannot come to us in that way. It is ever and always a "gift" from God.

It's one of those very special gifts spoken about in chapter one of this Book of James . . . verse 16,

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
(James 1:16-17)

In those words, God is warning us to not deceive ourselves into thinking that we are personally able to do all the things of this life. There are some things that must come from Him and from Him alone. And such is this gracious gift of "faith".

And may we also remember that this “gift of faith” is not a one-time gift. It is one of those gifts that ever-flows, and even increases as the Holy Spirit abides continually within our spirit, and as our trust in Christ grows. This is so very important for us to know and to remember. The blessed Holy Spirit is an ever-flowing well-spring of so many, many treasures that God showers upon those who, with love, surrender their hearts to Him. Listen to those wonderful words in 1 Corinthians 2!

⁹ . . . as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

What a wonderful promise! And folks, listen, may we clearly understand from scriptures verses such as this, that it is not only the “faith” itself that comes as a “gift” from God, it is also all those many other blessings that flow out from our faith. In Christ, we are now “family”, adopted sons of God, and able to share in all the many benefits of being a “true child of the King”. Praise be to God!

But with that being said, and very true, one of the things that often confuses us is that, although our faith and the things we receive through our faith are all gifts from God, you and I still do have a part that we must do in this matter of faith. Mysteriously, as it concerns other people that we encounter, it is you and I, who are the “means” by which God pours out “gifts” to them. And you and I must be diligent in our efforts to do our part, to do those “good works”. But again, as our efforts work themselves out in the daily activities of our life, we can sometimes get confused as to exactly who is doing them, ourselves or God.

Why am I giving this such strong emphasis here today? It's because, in recent days, my wife and I have had opportunity to view a documentary movie on the “Word of Faith Movement” called “The American Gospel: Christ Alone”. It is a documentary film that is a critique of the “Prosperity Gospel” movement that has been sweeping across America, and also into most all the world, especially into poverty stricken third world countries.

Featured prominently in the documentary are leaders and organizations such as, Bill Johnson of the Bethel Church, Joel Olsten, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn and many others.

As part of their doctrine, the leaders of the “Word of Faith” movement declare that through “faith”, their members are fully able to do as God the Father did in the beginning, and use their “words of faith” to “speak” things of “health and prosperity” into existence.

Much of their doctrine is clearly heretical and is found nowhere in the scriptures. But near the top of the list of their heresies is the proclamation that each person’s faith has its own power, and is able to gain them “personal” health and prosperity, that all they have to do is “believe it” and “speak it” and it will come into being in their lives, in their homes, and in their families.

And folks, at the basis of this belief is a heresy beyond heresies! It is the belief that, as “children of God” we ourselves become “gods”. And as “little gods”, we are able to do as God our Father did in the beginning, and speak things into being, “something out of nothing”, and specifically to speak the desires of our hearts into being. And folks, that is a clear and unmitigated heresy. Please, if ever you are drawn into believing such preaching and teaching, “flee” immediately from it!

As we just read a moment ago, we can easily be “deceived” by the power of our own desires into believing things that are not true. Folks, you and I are ever and always simply children of the earth, from dust we came and to dust we will go. Yes, in Christ, our spirits are eternally saved. And yes, in eternity we will also even have a new and eternal body. But we will never be a “god”! That deity is reserved only for God the Father, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. And praise be to God for that truth, because you and I would not make very good “gods”. We are too self-centered and too self-seeking.

And again, may I bring us back to the “biblical” understanding about faith, and that is that while yes, you and I really will enjoy great blessings that come forth from our faith, the blessings we receive will mostly only be secondary to the real intended recipients of the benefits of our faith, and that is God Himself and “other people”.

Our scripture text today asks “what does it profit us” if we have faith; and then, it goes on to imply, even if we ourselves receive great blessings from it, but our neighbor receives no benefits at all from our faith. Again, what is the profit?

The clear message given in these words is that if we, through our faith, receive great blessings but refuse to let the precious "grace of God" flow on out from us into the hearts and lives of other people, then our faith is useless and dead.

And again, this clear teaching from God is contrary to the "Prosperity Gospel" teachers who seem to have their main focus to be upon the lure of us, as individuals, being able to obtain personal gain. Here in these words of our Scripture text God is plainly speaking about how we should focus the concerns of our faith on meeting the needs of others. Listen again to these words!

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and 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? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)

I'm sure that the "Word of Faith" members would insist that they also focus their faith on the needs of other people. And I do believe that that is often true, especially in matters of health and physical and emotional suffering. But folks, in most all that I have learned over the years about this "Prosperity Gospel", too often, the real focus of both the preachers and their congregants is ultimately upon their own welfare and personal gain.

And while I hesitate to suggest this, If you are confident that you have the spiritual strength to resist the lure of it all, I would encourage you to listen to some of the ordinary weekly teaching and preaching of those leaders, Bill Johnson, Joel Olsten, Kenneth Copeland, Crefelo Dollar, Todd White, Stephen Furtick, Jesse Duplantis, and many others.

And may I say again, this heretical doctrine that is being preached by these men, is also being exported to other countries, especially into some of the poorest of nations. Under the guise of "taking the gospel to the nations" and through other "missionary efforts", these men and their organizations are taking their heretical teachings to the poorest of the poor.

And powerful people, just like them, who live in those poor nations learn quickly and easily. Today, a man that is known as the “wealthiest preacher in the world” has a megachurch in Nigeria. His name is Bishop David Oyedepo. He is known to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars. The “prosperity gospel” makes the leaders very, very prosperous.

But folks, this heretical teaching is not only taking place in our big cities and in those foreign countries, it is taking place right here in our rural Mississippi neighborhood churches. And the same tactics are being used on our folks. In most every situation, the people are being told that they must first “give”, “plant a seed” with their gifts and offerings, and then God will bless them by “pouring” out great blessings upon them. Unfortunately, most of the time, that “pouring out” ends up in the pockets of the church leaders.

Now, lest I continue with these words and allow my preaching to deteriorate into an “ungodly rant”, I will return to our scripture text and to God’s true intention for our faith. And it is this! God’s true intention for your and my “faith” is that it be the means by which we receive His blessed salvation through Jesus Christ. And from there, our “faith” is to become the means through which we enjoy an ongoing and eternal personal loving relationship with our blessed Lord.

And then from there, that the outworking of our faith be for the “Glory of God”, and for the benefit of other people, especially those within the “Body of Christ”. And while yes, you and I will receive many personal blessings ourselves as we “work out our faith”, the intended beneficiaries of our faith is God Himself and then the people around us that God calls our neighbors.

And He wants our faith to be “worked out” in the ordinary circumstances of daily life. And so, may I again read our text here in James 2?

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Note again that these “good works” are focused on meeting the needs of other people. While it may be assumed that the giver of these necessities of

life has at least some measure of wealth and plenty to share, he or she may not . . . they may not. They may have only their own clothes to share with the ones in need. They may only have their own meager portion of food to share.

But folks, even on those occasions when us “givers” have plenty to share, we sometimes “think” ourselves to be poor. And that kind of mindset can make our willingness to help others more difficult.

Simply put, it is quite often, that the “good works” God expects from you and me will interfere with our own personal comfort and provision. And then also added to that, we often are being asked to engage with people who are not easy to love and to help, causing us to doubt and to question all the more.

But part of the unspoken message of these words is that it is during those uncertain times of questioning that we must remind ourselves that these circumstances of life are really not about you and me, not about our own needs, not about our own health or our own financial problems. And they are not really even about those other people that God has chosen to involve us with. It really is ever and always first about Christ and about His ministry that He is asking us to carry forward.

You and I are simply the means by which Christ carries forward His grace, His mercy, His plans and His purposes for the world. And when our struggles get difficult, when we begin to question, when our faith begins to falter, the source for new strength and new direction to help us get up and get going again, can only come from the One who called us into His service to begin with, Christ Himself. It will be only as we draw back up nearer to Him that we will gain the strength to continue on.

And though I know that I am repeating myself, may I say to us, over and over again, that all that is being spoken about here regarding “faith” and “works” is far, far bigger, than just you and me and a brother or sister in need. Its real purpose extends all the way to the heavens, to bring “glory to God, our Father”!

May we close with these words from our Lord from Hebrews 11

6 . . . without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

And from Ephesians 2, verse 10

10 . . . we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
(Ephesians 2:10)