

## Faith That Works Part 3

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)

As we return again to these precious words about "faith" that we've been examining over the past few weeks, may we recognize in these words, a very ordinary circumstance of life that takes place all around us daily, that of "real basic human needs". Here in these words, "a brother or sister is naked and is destitute of daily food". And then also, may we consider the choices that we are faced with making as we are actually confronted by those needs. And especially, "What will our "faith" tell us to do?"

As we read these words, we are also reminded of a central theme of understanding that keeps coming to the forefront, and that is, as we "work out" the "faith" that Christ has "worked into" our souls in salvation, there must, of necessity, be a "change" that emerges within our soul and within our behavior, that the "gift of faith" we received in those first moments when we were "born again from above", must become increasingly evidenced by real change within our soul, and again, especially, change within our behavior, change that is so evident that it can be clearly witnessed by ourselves and by the people around us, else our "faith" may be "useless", even "dead".

And there are numerous scriptures that attest to this. In Matthew 7, Jesus said,

16 You will know them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:16)

And in 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read,

17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Folks, that moment we first received the Spirit of Christ into our soul, we actually became a completely new creature, “born again from above” and forever “changed”. And again, that “change” is so real that the people who know us best will clearly be able to see and know that we are different.

What is it that can bring about that kind of “change”? There are many things, I’m sure, and all of them from God. But I especially like God’s use of the word “light”. We’re told in John chapter 1 and in other similar passages in the gospels that Jesus is “The Light”. And I’d like to emphasize that He is called “The” “Light”, the word “The” meaning that Jesus is a “Light” that is like no other “Light”. The “Light” that shines forth through Him is so pure and Holy and so powerful, that no darkness can withstand it or overpower it!

And as His “Light” enters into your and my souls, it dispels all the forms of darkness that resides there, especially the darkness where “sin” abides.

And oh, that “darkness” is so widespread and pervasive! It not only abides within an unbelieving soul, it is everywhere, all around us, engulfing the world and concealing the ways and the activities of sin, blinding the eyes of unbelievers, preventing them from knowing that the deeds they do are sinful and evil.

And that darkness is so common that no one in the unbelieving world even knows that it exists. They live and breathe and have all of their being within that darkness, thinking that the darkness is “normal”, and again, unfortunately, never even realizing it’s there.

And it is that “darkness” that enables some people to walk right by other people who might be in the direst of need and never even be aware of the suffering those people are enduring.

But thanks be to God, as you and I surrender our hearts and lives to Christ in salvation and as we begin to “work out” the faith that Christ has worked into our souls, our eyes are opened and that special “Light” of Christ shines into the darkness and enables us to see things that we’ve never seen before, things that others can’t see, enabling us to see the needs and the suffering of

our brethren, enabling our spirit to have compassion that we never had before, and with that compassion, finding ourselves wanting to help.

Think for a moment folks! In those times when you have reached out to help someone in need, did you assume that it was simply something that you had “thought up” all by yourself? May I suggest that while yes, you “did the works”, the compulsion to help came first from the “Light of Christ” who now lives in you. Because that is what He does!

And again, your doing of those acts of mercy and compassion are a part of those many changes that God wants to wrought within your and my life through the “faith” He has worked into us in our salvation.

But may I hesitate here and say that there is also a difficult side to those many changes that God wants to “work out” within our souls. Yes, He has given us everything that we need for life and godliness. But our old self, our old “flesh”, still likes so many of those things and habits and behaviors that once were the normal desires of our old heart, our old self. And our old self doesn’t want to give them up.

Unfortunately for our wearied soul, the sin nature that once resided within and ruled over our souls before our conversion still has accesses to our “flesh” and still desires to have control over us, much as it did before we were saved. And with most all of us, there are still affinities and attachments to old former sinful habits and behaviors lingering within us, affinities and attachments that are often powerful in their lure and temptation. And they keep us too busied and too distracted to see the “better things” that God has arranged for us to do.

I know of Christians who are former drug addicts, former alcoholics, former practicing homosexuals, former gamblers, former sexual deviants, and on and on. And unfortunately, while salvation does free a person from the actual “control” of their old sinful natures, salvation does not wipe away the memories and the affinities that a person might still have hidden in the recesses of their soul.

And for many people, those old memories and affinities, along with the remaining vestiges of their old dead “sin nature” can rise up without notice

and engage in a powerful fight to regain their former control, sometimes plunging those people back into their old sinful ways of life.

The scriptures speak about three powerful enemies of a person's soul, the "world, the flesh and the devil". And those three know all the secrets that reside within each person's soul. They know a person's weaknesses. They know how to continually "feed" that person's sinful appetites with whatever sins fits their character. And all for the purpose of keeping us from doing the "better thing", that of "working out our faith" in the things God has for us to do!

And folks, those sinful affinities and behaviors don't have to be outward and blatantly sinful to such an extent that they are always obvious to other people. Quite often, many of those sinful ways are well-concealed from the people around us and sometimes, even from our own selves, sins like, anger, hatred, lust, pride, bigotry, covetousness, selfishness, and on and on, private sins that eat away at our soul and keep us from doing those "better things of faith".

And again, may I remind us that these words from the Apostle James are written to believers, those who are saved, "truly saved". And so, we must understand that, even now, our own old sinful appetites will not often just "go away", but will continue to "gnaw away" at our souls, trying to drag us back under their control.

And those same three old enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil will never quit. They seem to work even harder. And they will return daily, often minute by minute, to try to work their "magic", perhaps even knowing they can't really win us back, but settling for at least making our lives miserable. Sin is that kind of enemy!

In an earlier message, I recounted for you the suffering that the Apostle Paul endured as these battles with sin raged within his flesh, his spirit battling with his flesh, his flesh battling with his spirit.

In Romans chapters 6, 7 and 8, God reveals to us the often-tortuous sequence of sufferings and then relief that Paul experienced. In Romans chapter 6, Paul acknowledged that he knows that he is fully and eternally

saved, and that sin cannot control him any longer. Listen carefully to those words of Romans 6:10-14

10 . . . the death he (Christ) died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you. (Romans 6:10-14)

Here, in these words, the Apostle Paul fully understood that in Christ, he, and consequently you and I, have been delivered from any further control of sin. Sin is no longer our master, as it was before we were saved.

But then, we read in the next chapter, chapter 7, that Paul steps back to remind us that even after we are fully and eternally saved, our enemies do not stop their assault upon our souls.

There, beginning in verse 19 of Romans 7, you can hear the anguish in Paul's voice as he cries out these words. Listen!

19 . . . the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. 20 Now if I do what I will not *to do*, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. 21 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:19-25)

Folks, thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit is always at work to help us in our distress. Here in these words, as the Apostle Paul seems under a relentless attack from his flesh, it is also clear that the Holy Spirit is just as much relentless in His work, convicting Paul of his sins and bringing him back to the only One who can rescue him from the clutches of sin, the Lord Jesus. Listen again to those words, beginning in verse 24,

24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:24-25)

And then dear friends, some of the most wonderful and precious words that grace the pages of scripture are given to us in the very next verse, Romans 8, verse 1.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

What precious and loving words these are, assuring us that though we suffer many of these same struggles every day in our battle with the world, the flesh and the devil, we are ultimately lovingly protected and relieved from it all, and especially from the eternal penalties and consequences of our sins, paid for by the precious blood that Jesus shed on the cross for us. Jesus truly did "pay it all"! Praise be to God!

And I must pause here for a moment and ask you, personally and individually, "Do you believe these words?" Do you really and truly believe that now, though you struggle daily as Paul did with the attacks and temptations of sin, that in Christ Jesus, you truly have been set free from sin and from your bondage to it, that sin is no longer your master, that you can actually say "no" to any sin that tempts you, no matter how much you used to love it? Do you really believe that to be true? You should, I should, because this is the "Word of God" and it is trustworthy to believe!

Now, with all of this being said and fully known to us, we will also acknowledge and accept that the battle with sin that the Apostle Paul spoke about here, will still continue. Some might ask, "but why"? Why does our merciful and gracious God not also protect us from these temptations and the wiles of the devil?

And I must confess that I do not know a good answer for that question. I wonder it myself. But I do believe that it has everything to do with God's holiness. In His holiness, God must allow all the members of the battle to have their "free will" behaviors, you, me, our friends, our families, our neighbors, even our enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil.

All of the combatants are being “brought to the table” and are being given choices to make, and we are the ones who must make them. God tells us about those choices in Deuteronomy 30. There God was speaking to His beloved children Israel about their struggles and their choices. But very much the same is true for you and me. Listen to those words!

<sup>15</sup> “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, <sup>16</sup> in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments . . .

And verse 19,

<sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:15–19 (NKJV))

As these words tell us, God places choices before each of us in our daily battle with sin, believers and unbelievers alike. And you and I have our choices and we must make them. But please understand that this is not random happenstance. As He tells us here in these words, each of those choices are being placed there by the Providential Hand of God Himself. Yes, they might seem to be just ordinary circumstances of daily life, and they are. But they are also more, far more. They are the plans and purposes of our Sovereign God, being worked out, and they require choices to be made by you and me. And we must, by faith, make the right choices.

May I quickly remind us of those choices given in our scripture text . . . Listen!

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

You and I may not recognize that it is taking place, but this is an ordinary circumstance and an ordinary choice that faces us daily. Those who are in dire need may not be right in front of us, but they are still there, in our neighborhoods, even in our families and in our friendships. And what are the choices that we are making? Are we, by ignoring those needs, freely admitting that our faith has some real “dead spots” within it?

Again, as we learned in the first chapter of this Book of James, God is always at work, “testing our faith”, bringing circumstances and needs right up into our face and asking, “what are we going to do with these opportunities”?

And folks, “faith” does not just ask “what are we going to do with these opportunities that come to us”? First and foremost, “Faith” asks, “what is God’s plan and purpose for this opportunity?” With each of these ordinary circumstances of life that come to us, our immediate prayer must be, “Dear Lord Jesus, help me to be the person you want me to be, and help me to humbly do exactly as you would do”!

Listen as we close . . .

<sup>15</sup> “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, <sup>16</sup> in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments.  
(Deuteronomy 30:15–16)