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Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "Why Belief in God is Not Enough" (1977). *Vaught Sermon Notes: James*. 1.
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WHY BELIEF IN GOD IS NOT ENOUGH

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES
NUMBER 20
JAMES 2:19-20

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JAMES 2:19-20 "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"

The theme of the book of Romans is "Justification by Faith." The theme of the book of James is "Justification by Works." There are some people who think they are really smart and know it all and they say that Romans and James contradict each other. So they use this as one of their trump cards to illustrate the fact that the Bible has contradictions in it. They say that Romans states that you are justified by faith and James states that you are justified by works. But even just a casual glance at this passage will show that there is no real contradiction between Romans and James.

Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore being justified by faith." When you apply that to Abraham, you have to go back to Genesis 15:6, "And he had believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness." This was the time of his salvation when Christ visited him in Ur and he became a believer. Now, more than 60 years later, James says of Abraham in James 2:21 that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac. So these two justifications in Abraham are separated by about 60 years. One was justification by faith, which brings salvation. The second was justification by works, which refers to his production. One refers to the salvation of Abraham, the other refers to the vindication which came to Abraham by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac.

James 2 goes on and uses Rahab as a second illustration. She hid the spies when they came to spy out the land, and in so doing, was justified by her act of works. But she had been justified by faith some time before that, when she heard about the power of God in the life of Pharaoh in setting the Jews free from Egyptian bondage. One was the faith of salvation and the other was the faith of production. Rahab thus became the wife of one of those spies and became the great-grandmother of King David and thus moved into the line of people who produced Christ. Rahab had a rope factory and she was ordered to hang a red rope out of her window and in this way her whole house was spared and all the rest of the city was destroyed. Joshua gave the command to slaughter all those in the city of Jericho except Rahab and her family. So it is quite clear we have two kinds of faith here, one a saving faith, and the other a producing faith.

In salvation faith has a working object and that working object is Jesus Christ. He did all the work for salvation on the cross. Then in living the Christian life, faith must have a working object and that working object is Bible doctrine in the mind.

In salvation you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. That is justification by faith. In the Christian life you are justified by works and the thing that produces those works is Bible doctrine in the mind.

Look now again at a correct translation of verse 18--

"But someone will say, you have faith and I have works. Demonstrate to me your faith apart from works, and I will demonstrate my faith out from my works."

This strawman, this imaginative character in this last verse, needs some information and we can now give it to him from these next two verses.

JAMES 2:19 "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." "Thou believest" is a present, active, indicative of "pisteuo." Generally speaking all the Jews believed in God. "Su" is a personal pronoun and it refers to the Jews involved in Judaism. They believed "One is the God" and the words are "heis O Theos." They believed that God is one person, not three. JAMES IS ILLUSTRATING HERE THAT THE JEWS DO NOT HAVE A WORKING OBJECT FOR THEIR FAITH, FOR THEY DO NOT BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST. They believed in God The Father but they didn't believe in the one who died on the cross for their sins. Jesus Christ is the one who did the work for them on the cross, whereby, they could be saved. He is the God-man, the only one who can save, but by believing in one God, the Judaizers have excluded Christ.

Look for a moment at what believing in one God meant to the Jews.

1. The Jews interpreted that Scripture "The Lord our God is one Lord" to mean God the Father at the exclusion of Jesus Christ and The Holy Spirit. (This is incorrect. It means one in essence, one in characteristics. All three members of the Godhead have the same essence.)
2. The creed of Judaism is deism, a belief in one God. Voltaire was a deist.
3. While belief in the existence of God is a step in the right direction, it doesn't save anyone. No one has ever been saved by believing in the existence of God.
4. One must have a working object for faith in order to be saved. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby, we must be saved." Acts 4:12
5. Judaism had faith without production--namely, without salvation.
6. This verse is a perfect illustration of dead faith, no force that produced salvation.

This verse goes on to say, "Thou doest" and this is a present, active, indicative of "poieo" but in greek it is not as stated here, for it is a question and should read, "Do you do well?" The word for "well" is "kalos" and it means "Do you do beneficially?" In other words, does your faith in God produce anything? Then he illustrated it by saying, "The demons also believe in one God, and they tremble." The word for their believing is also a present, active, indicative of "Pisteuo." They believe in one God just exactly like the Jews did.

Summary

1. The object of demon faith does not produce salvation. The same is true of demons as was true of the Jews. The only thing this kind of believing produced was trembling and judgment.

2. The demons actually believed in Jesus Christ as a judge.
3. The object of this kind of faith is actually working and will eventually produce judgment.
MATTHEW 25:41 "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:"
4. Therefore demon faith in "The One God" produced something-- namely, fear and trembling.

The word for trembling here is a present, active, indicative of "phrisso" and it means to shudder with fear.

So the correct translation of this verse goes like this--"So you believe that THE GOD is one God! Do you do so beneficially, in so believing? The demons believe exactly this and shudder with fear."

1. This kind of inner faith of demons by believing in The One God results overtly in shuddering with terror. They know their judgment is certain. Matthew 25:41
2. The object of faith does the working--it judges them at the end of time.
3. Again we ask you to look at the question--"Does belief in God benefit one as far as salvation is concerned?"
4. The answer to that question is "No!" For belief to benefit one it must have The Saviour, The Lord Jesus Christ, as the working object of that faith. The Father did not go to the cross, the Holy Spirit did not go to the cross. The only Saviour is the Lord Jesus Christ and to ignore him and leave him out is to bypass salvation.
5. The demons rejected Christ and in so doing passed the point of no return.
6. Therefore this demon faith cannot express itself except in fear and trembling. Their judgment is certain. The lake of fire is their destiny.

Now apply this same truth to mankind

1. Only "in time" can faith appropriate salvation for man, by having Jesus Christ as the working object of his faith.
2. Once man passes the point of no return, which is physical death, faith in Christ can no longer save him. He can change his mind in eternity, but it is then too late for man to be saved.
3. In eternity faith in Christ can only produce in man fear and trembling just as it did in the case of the demons.
HEBREWS 9:27-28 "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

4. James illustrates from the negative production of terror in eternity. Once the unbeliever passes the point of death, he has nothing to look forward to but the second death. "It is appointed unto man once to die, and after that the judgment."
5. Once man passes the deadline of physical death "in time" without believing in Christ, all the faith in God in the world won't save him.
6. This is a warning to the unbeliever--now is the day of salvation
7. Once death occurs in the life of the unbeliever, there is nothing ahead but judgment.

Now look at this question put to the Jews--the Jews who believe in "The one God."

1. Does belief in "The One God" benefit the Jews so far as salvation is concerned? James says, "No, it doesn't."
2. Judaism was in bondage to religion which could neither save nor produce any fruit for God.
3. Therefore, Jews, take a look at demons and see that it didn't save them and produced only fear in them, and it will do the same for you.
4. This demon's faith, like the faith of the Jews, expressed something negative, namely, fear and trembling.
5. This is the great challenge of the Book of James for the Jews to believe in Christ.
6. While the Christian's faith in Christ in his soul is invisible, it has a working object which is Jesus Christ.
7. Regeneration is invisible, only the results of regeneration can be seen.
8. Therefore, believing for Christians provides for them in grace the object of faith, and these things will have an impact on others.
9. Thereby ambassadorship is fulfilled in the intensified stage of the Angelic Conflict. Doctrine always brings production in the Christian life.
10. When there is no doctrine as the working object in the life of the believer, then the only thing produced is operational death. No visible production, then no obvious evidence you are in the plan of God is the inevitable result.

So you can see from all of this that God despises human good and all production of the flesh.

JAMES 2:20 "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"

This comparative particle "de" translated "but" sets up a contrast between Judaism and demons on the one side, and believers under operational death as described in this verse. "Wilt thou" is a present, active, indicative of "Telo" and means "Do you wish or are you willing." Then we have the aorist, active, infinitive of "ginosko" and this means to learn from experience. So it really means, "Are you willing to learn from the experience of study?" The only way to have a working object for your faith is to learn doctrine. There is one and only one working object for your faith in production and that is doctrine.

ONE SAVIOUR FOR MANKIND AND THAT ONE IS JESUS CHRIST.

ONE WORKING OBJECT FOR PRODUCING FAITH AND THAT OBJECT IS DOCTRINE.

So the question is simply this--Are you willing to know from taking in doctrine every day? Somewhere along the line your faith must come to have a working object or you will continue to be operationally dead. "O vain man" is a vocative masculine singular from "kenos anthropos" and it means empty, fruitless, void, without truth, empty of doctrine. This believer refers to the believer who never grew up, never took in doctrine. (I dedicate this to Southern Baptists for we have so many millions of exactly this type.) A believer must be filled with doctrinal truth if he is going to be a producer. That which is produced in your life apart from doctrine is the sum total of ZERO. It may impress men, and it may even produce impressive statistics, but it doesn't impress God.

Now we have come to the moment of truth in this verse. Please notice it closely. "That faith without works is dead." The words for faith is "he pistis" and it means "The faith." It is an unemployed faith, it is an idle faith, it is a barren faith. Faith without the working object of doctrine is a corpse, it can't produce a thing. So James is talking about faith without a working object. So the whole question is simply this--are you willing to learn doctrine so your faith can be a producing faith?