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FAITH IN ACTION WHICH THE UNBELIEVER CAN SEE

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES.
JAMES 2:14-16
NUMBER 18

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JAMES 2:14-16 "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?"

We have before us one of the most misunderstood sections of the Bible. Because many do not understand the viewpoint from which James wrote, they misunderstand his emphasis on practical faith. Many believe that James attacks saving faith, which he doesn't do at all. James is looking at faith through the eyes of the unbeliever. The unbeliever can't look into the soul of the believer and he can't see this thing called salvation. He wants some concrete proof of one's salvation. He wants to see production rather than profession. We will see how James approached this problem in these verses now before us.

We might illustrate it like this. "So you say you are a builder. You construct houses. Show me some house you have built, and then I will really know that you are a builder." Now that's exactly the position James is taking there. Or, take another illustration. "So you say you are a banker. Well, show me your bank. Let me see your financial statement. Let me look at your vault and see where you have your money stored. Then, and only then will I believe that you are a banker." Now this is the position of James concerning faith. This is indeed a very practical study for all of us.

JAMES 2:14 "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" This word "what" is an interrogative pronoun, a nominative neuter gender, so it means that with this "What" a principle is to be introduced. The word for "profit" is "Ophelos" and it means advantage, benefit, or profit. (Now keep this in mind. The unbeliever looks at the Christian and he wants to put the cart before the horse. He wants to see production and then if he sees production, he will then concede that this man is a genuine Christian. He goes to results before he sees the cause that produces the results.) So James is here looking at a Christian through the eyes of the unbeliever. This is so well expressed in this verse.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:14 "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

This verse says that it is impossible for the soulish man, the unregenerated man to understand spiritual things, for they have to be understood by means of the spirit. The unbeliever cannot see the believer's faith which is down in the soul. It's just so much hot air to him. The unbeliever is unimpressed by such profession.

James goes on to say in this verse, "My brethren" so this question is addressed to believers. The next word is "though" and it really means "if" and it introduces a third class condition. The word for "a man" is "tis" and it means anyone. It really means any believer. If anyone

"says" and the word is a present, active, subjunctive of "lego." In other words, if believers keep on saying that they have faith, but the unbeliever doesn't understand it or can't see it, then is it of any value? Yes, it's of value but not to the unbeliever for he can't see it.

So thus far James has made this point. "Faith is invisible and can't be seen by the unbeliever." So if any believer says he had faith but the faith doesn't produce, there is nothing convincing for the unsaved man to see.

The word for "have faith" is a present, active, infinitive of "echo" and it means to have and to hold.

Then James adds "And have not works." This is a present, active, subjunctive of "echo" plus "ergon," which means production. It really means anything that has been produced by Bible doctrine.

Then James says, "Can this faith save him?" The word for "can" is a present, active, indicative of "dunamai."

We have to answer James' question in two ways. Yes, faith can save a man from hell and it is the only way a man can be saved and saved eternally. But that's not the question James is asking here. James is asking this question, "Can this man be saved in the eyes of the unbeliever if he doesn't produce anything?" and the answer is "No, he can't." He is saved in the eyes of God and will die and go to heaven, but in the eyes of the unbeliever he isn't any more saved than the man who doesn't make any profession of salvation.

GET TEN POINTS ON THESE TWO KINDS OF FAITH

We are talking here about saving faith and producing faith.

1. THE DOUBLE MEANING OF FAITH IN SCRIPTURE.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved--that's saving faith. But the unbeliever doesn't know anything about that. The only thing he knows is what he sees.

The unbeliever has to see faith that is produced from doctrine in action. Let me explain it this way. It is like shooting a gun. The trigger is faith, but the ammunition which you shoot when you pull the trigger is doctrine in action. This is the only way the unbeliever can see faith.

The first is saving faith.

The second is working or producing faith. The ammunition is stored here in the Bible, but you have to put the ammunition in the gun of service and let faith pull the trigger so the unbeliever can see and hear the results.

2. THE STANDPOINT OF THE UNBELIEVER.

All James is writing here is presented from the standpoint of the unbeliever. Faith saves, but faith has to produce so the unbeliever can see the reality of it.

3. THIS QUESTION ANTICIPATES A NEGATIVE ANSWER.

"Can faith save him?" And the believer says, "Yes, it can."

"Can faith save him?" And the unbeliever says, "No, it can't." But they are talking about a different thing all together. One is talking about the act of salvation and the other is talking about the act of production.

4. IT TAKES PRODUCTION TO IMPRESS THE UNBELIEVER.
When the believer says, "I have faith in Christ and I am saved." the unbeliever looks at that and says, "I can't see it. I have not experienced it. Therefore, it isn't real to me. I don't believe in the reality of it."
5. IN VERSE 20 FAITH WITHOUT PRODUCTION IS SAID TO BE OPERATIONAL DEATH.
6. FROM THE DIVINE VIEWPOINT ONLY FAITH IN CHRIST CAN SAVE ONE.
ROMANS 1:16-17 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."
GALATIANS 3:26 "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."
JOHN 20:31 "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."
7. FAITH SAVES YOU BUT IT DOESN'T CONVINCe THE UNBELIEVER.
Only production convinces the unbeliever.
Paul says that the Christians are exhibit A to the unbelieving world.
2 CORINTHIANS 3:3 "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."
8. A BELIEVER CAN BE SAVED AND STILL BE OPERATIONALLY DEAD.
Many Christians believe and are saved, but then they learn no doctrine and they produce nothing that convinces the unbelieving world.
9. NO BELIEVER CAN LOSE HIS SALVATION.
The believer under operational death, under reversionism hasn't lost his salvation, he has just lost his witness to the unbeliever because he hasn't produced anything overtly that the unbeliever can see. (Like the shortsighted usher we have studied a bit earlier. Do you believe that any unbeliever would be deeply impressed that the shortsighted usher was a Christian? Certainly not.)
10. NON-PRODUCTIVE FAITH SHOULD NOT TRY TO WITNESS.
If a believer is non-productive and doesn't have any doctrine in his human spirit, then he can't be much of a witness to the unbeliever.

JAMES 2:15 "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food," Here is "Ean" plus the subjunctive which introduces a third class condition and it uses a male and a female believer to carry out the illustration. The word for "be" here is a present, active, subjunctive of "huparcho" and it means "to exist." The word "naked" is the

nominative plural of "gumnos." It really doesn't mean naked but it means inadequate clothing. The reason the word is plural is to show they have some clothing, but not adequate clothing. The real meaning is to have insufficient clothing. The word "destitute" is a present, passive, participle of "leipo" and it means constantly being deficient of daily food. The word for food is "trophe" and it means nourishing food.

JAMES 2:16 "And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?" The "one of you" in this verse is the believer who is in reversionism, a believer in emotional revolt in the soul. This is the one who has faith but no works. The word for "say" is an aorist, active, subjunctive and means "might allege." In other words, this is the one who gives words instead of food. Now what does this one allege? "Go away in peace" is a present, active, imperative of "hupago" and is a nice word answer. The word for peace is "eirene" the word from which we get the proper name Irene. But when a person is hungry, words don't help. In addition to words, this one gives the hungry man some advice. "Be warmed" is a present, passive, imperative of "thermaino." So here we have just words, no real help. But you can't help people like this with just words. When people are cold and hungry, they can't hear the words you are saying. Physical needs must be met first, then you give them doctrine. (Now let me throw in something here. Don't pick this up and make a whole way of life from this. Some will take this statement and say something like this-- "Instead of doing missionary work and instead of telling people the way of life in Christ, our major thrust ought to be feeding the hungry and clothing the naked." That is not true. Those who go out on a program of this kind won't do anything but feed the hungry and clothe the naked and will leave the main task undone.)

The unbeliever looking at this will say, "Those believers who just give words don't have any faith." Yes, they do have faith, but they don't impress the unbelieving world that they have faith.

Now when people are drunk or drugged and you try to give them the gospel, you soon discover that they can't take it in. Words will not put clothes on their backs or food in their mouths.

The verse goes on to say, "Be ye filled" and it is a present, passive, imperative of "chortazo" and it means to be physically satisfied. But hungry people can't be satisfied with words.

Then the verse says, "You do not give" and this is an aorist, active, subjunctive of "didomi" and the word for food and clothing is "epite-deios" and it means the necessities for the body. The word for body here is "soma" and it means a live, responsive body.

This brings into focus a very important doctrine. You can't divorce the soul and the body. They go together. It is very important to bring a relaxed, well adjusted body to the service so you can learn. The body and the soul can never be divorced. That's why God has made provision for our physical needs. He knows we can't learn unless we have a relaxed mind and a comfortable body.

Look At This Important Doctrine

The body and soul are inseparable and they must go together. Concentration is not possible in a body that is falling apart physically. That is why Saturday night activity becomes so very important for the Christian. How can anyone who, forgive the expression, "raises all kind of hell on Saturday night," expect to take in doctrine on Sunday morning?

No wonder so many people are miserable in church on Sunday morning, for they were laying the ground for it by their activity on Saturday night. In more than just a casual way, I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to all of you to really prepare for Sunday by your Saturday night activity. If you live through Sunday in a hangover kind of physical state, no wonder the Bible can't speak to you in a powerful way.

People can go so far in reversionism in this kind of reckless activity that it will eventually lead to the sin unto death. We have gone through a decade or more of drug and alcohol addiction, and if this is continued, the nation will eventually come to the point of no return.

An illustration of this truth is King Saul. It all came out at the Battle of Gilboa. He had gone so far in his hatred and jealousy of David that the night before his final fall, he went down to the Cave in Endor to commune with a witch. He was desperate and was willing to get help from any quarter. The next day he couldn't even fight with assurance, and when he came to kill himself, he had to have assistance. He passed the point of no return in his soul, and this spilled out on his body and it was all over.

So James has brought to us a very important doctrine. The relationship between the body and the soul is vitally important. You can't drag your body through hell on Saturday night and then walk in fellowship with God on Sunday morning.

So this verse goes like this--

"And one from among you should say, "Go away! Go away in peace! Keep on being warmed and keep on being filled! But you do not give them those necessities for their body, then what gain, what profit, what advantage?"

You will notice that they don't answer the question. This is a way the greeks had of stating a question and then just let it hang there. They knew there was no need for an answer. Silence answered their question. And the silence now in your own mind will answer this question for you. You must answer it and I must answer it.

Some of you will have to answer this question this next Saturday night. Some of you will have to answer this question the next time you confront a hungry or ill-clothed person. What will your answer be?