



Adulting

Accept

Snooze

Expositional study on the book of James.

*The #1 catalyst for spiritual growth is reading and reflecting on the Bible.
Use these questions for personal study or as part of a community group experience.*

WEEK 4 OF 7

10/08/2017

Note to Leaders: James 2:14-26 elaborates on the themes of hearing and obeying covered earlier in the letter. This week the focus will be on the partnership of faith and action.

Sermon Questions

1. As you listened to this week's message, what thoughts or questions immediately came to mind?
2. What challenge did John give this week? Jot down a couple of initial reflections or responses to that challenge.
3. Re-read James 2:14-26. Can you summarize the passage in two sentences? What's the main message?

Discussion Questions

1. Would you agree with the statement, "faith is something you do and not something you know"? Why do you agree or disagree?
2. What is meant by the word "works"? How are these related to one's relationship with God? (cf. John 14:15)
3. What example does James cite to show the futility of faith without works (vv. 15-16, 19)?

Do you think James proves his point by the examples he gives? Why or why not?

4. James never says that works without faith can save. What does this imply about faith?
5. What happens to faith when works do not accompany it?

What effects does that have on your relationship with God? Or, on your understanding of your own faith?

6. How have you seen faith and works go hand-and-hand in your life?
7. Which do you feel you have a better understanding or grasp on, faith or works?
8. In what ways do you need to bring your actions more in line with your beliefs?
9. For personal reflection, would you consider your faith more alive than dead? What are the vital signs of your faith?

Background Comments

Throughout church history there has been a perceived rift between the apostle Paul and James regarding the issue of faith and works. This division resolves itself when the content and intention of their letters are considered in their entirety. In this section of James, he argues against a simple knowledge-based faith in order to illustrate “true religion” (1:21). Here “true religion” begins with faith—but a faith that works.

The perceived difference for Paul and James comes from their starting point. Paul often addresses individuals who exhibit a form of godliness that arises from false motives in an attempt to place God and other individuals in their debt. Thus, Paul confronts external signs of righteousness (Jewish ethnicity, circumcision, abstention from certain foods, etc.) and points toward the internal transformation of the heart (similar to the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34). James appears to address the antithesis: since external signs do not matter I can hold a belief that is private and internal—thus I am superior because I have true faith that changes the heart.

The word for “works” in Greek is *ergon* and denotes behavior with ethical and religious consequences. These are deeds or works done in obedience to God. Some in the community appear to have refused service to their brothers and sisters while maintaining religious “talk” and claiming true belief. In other words, James argues that the faith he has just described is “not merely outwardly inoperative but inwardly dead”.¹

James does not contrast faith and works as if these are two alternative options in one’s approach to God. He is contrasting a faith that, because it is inherently defective, produces no works and a faith that, because it is genuine, results in action. In this sense, works bring faith to completion because they are the fruit of what is planted within. This is evidenced in the acts of trust taken by Abraham and Rahab, who at great cost to themselves trusted God in their actions and experienced deliverance. It is not simply that Abraham and Rahab acquired some mental ascent by which they professed “there is only one God,” but that their affirmation of God resulted in a change of behavior, which reflected a reordering of their lives on the basis of God’s authority.

The balanced approach, offered by both Paul and James, of faith working together with “works” toward faith’s completion—in theological terms “sanctification”—coheres well with the words of Jesus. You can see select statements in John 14:15, 23-24; Matthew 25:31-46.

¹ Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James* in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 126.

Prayer Requests

Take a few minutes to go around the room and ask if anyone has something they would like prayer for. Write these down as they are being shared.

Additionally, challenge people to begin praying about the step of maturity God may be calling them to during this series.

Finally, pray together. You can pray the prayer below or your own prayer that incorporates the requests represented in the group.

Closing Prayer

God, you desire trust and faith in you that is alive and active. Thank you for calling me into a deep relationship that has impact on who I am and how I relate with others. In this letter, I am reminded that this relationship can be either living or dead. Help me to pursue a living relationship with you that reflects my decision to follow you. May my faith be active, strengthening and completing my profession of faith in you. Grant me the confidence and determination to bring my actions and attitudes into alignment with your word. In Jesus name I pray, amen.