

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Faith and Works
James 2:14-26
Part Two

The vast majority of Americans consider themselves Christian but our country continues to lack any semblance of Holiness. The vast majority of Americans consider themselves Christian and yet our country still lacks Christlikeness. What is the problem? Why is it that there can be so many professing Christians in our country and still have problems of this magnitude? James answers that question in **James 2:14-26**.

“(14) What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? (15) If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? (17) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. (18) But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (19) You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. (20) But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? (21) Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? (22) You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; (23) and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to Him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God.” (24) You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. (25) And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? (26) For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

The reason why we can have so many Americans saying that they are Christians and yet have such a messed up society is most likely because their faith is “dead.” Their faith is not a true faith, a genuine faith, a living faith, a saving faith. James wants us to be knowledgeable of the differences between a dead faith, which does not save, and a living faith which does save.

He begins with exploring the characteristics of dead faith in **vv. 14-20**. We began exploring these characteristics two weeks ago. The first characteristic we considered is “empty confession.” We found this characteristic in **V. 14 “What use is it, my brethren, if a man says that he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?”** James does not say that he has saving faith. He only says that he claims to have saving faith. But, even though he claims to have saving faith, he has no works to verify it. The profession of so-called faith without works to confirm that profession of so-called faith leads James to ask this question, **“Can that faith save him?”** This question is not offered to dispute the importance of faith, but to oppose the idea that just any kind of faith can save. A profession of faith that does not result in righteous works cannot save a person, no matter how strongly it may be proclaimed, because that kind of faith is dead. What is the first characteristic of a “dead faith?” An “empty confession.”

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We find the second characteristic in **vv.15-17**. We can call this second characteristic of a dead faith, “False compassion.” I hope that not only because of this study we would better understand what the Scriptures mean when it speaks about a “dead faith,” but that we were be stirred to even greater acts of compassion.

FALSE COMPASSION

Christians are so very quick to say to another believer when they are going through hardship, “I’ll pray for you.” And certainly this is a good thing to say, especially if you are in fact praying for them. But should we be satisfied as believers with mere expressions of sympathy or a prayer, especially when we have resources of time, energy, or money that could in some way alleviate or minister to their suffering? I believe that in light of the teachings of God’s Word, our ministry to people and to other believers must go beyond a sympathetic word or a prayer if we are in a position to do so. James makes this point very well in **vv.15-17**.

Let us read these three verses, **“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”** James in **vv. 15-17** illustrates the point that James made in **V. 14**. He does this by comparing the so-called profession of faith without the corresponding works of faith, to words of compassion without the corresponding works of compassion. If we say that we have faith, let us see the works of faith. If we say that we have compassion, let us see the works of compassion.

The passage begins with the phrase **“If a brother or sister”** This reference is generally accepted to be referring to fellow believers. **“if a brother or sister ...”** or in other words “a fellow believer” comes into your life and **“is without clothing and in need of daily food.”**

When James refers to “without clothes,” this does not necessarily mean naked. The term was used of people wearing only an undergarment in 1 Sam. 19:24 and John 21:7 or, more generally, it might denote those who were poorly dressed or insufficiently dressed which is the case in Job 22:6; 31:19; Isaiah 58:7; Matt 25:36.

In addition to being poorly or insufficiently dressed, James also speaks of the person as being **“in need of daily food.”** Just as “without clothes” does not necessarily mean naked, neither does the expression “in need of daily food” mean “starvation,” rather it means insufficient nourishment for normal, healthy, living.

“If a brother or sister or in other words “a fellow believer” comes into our lives, **“.... is without clothes”** in other words they are poorly dressed or insufficiently dressed, **“and in need of daily food”** or in other words they are without sufficient nourishment for normal, healthy, living. **“And one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,.....”**

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The expression **“go in peace”** was a warm and kindly expression of farewell among the Jews. We see this in **1 Sam. 1:17; 20:42; 2 Sam. 15:9; Mark 5:4; Acts 16:36**. The expression communicates that everything will be okay as we put our trust in the Lord. Certainly this statement is not a bad statement to make. In fact, it is a wonderful statement. Christ Himself used it in **Luke 7:50** and **Luke 8:48**. But, we need to understand that He only used this expression after He Himself had acted in various ways to meet their needs. Jesus Himself would not have dismissed a person who was shivering and hungry with the words “Go in peace, be warmed and filled” until he had done what he could do to make sure that they were adequately dressed and adequately fed. Yes, God will take care of those who trust in Him, but we need to understand that God wants us to be the vehicle of His care when someone in need crosses our path, as we see inferred in the last part of this verse.

“If a brother or sister, a fellow believer comes into our lives “... and is without clothes.” he is poorly dressed, he is insufficiently dressed. **“.... and in need of daily food,”** He is without sufficient nourishment for normal, healthy, living. **“And one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,**” essentially by this statement assuring him of God’s provision, **“..... and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”**

The phrase “And yet you do not give them.....” indicates that the resources were available to help but were not offered. This comfortable and pious “armchair philanthropist” has no intention to supply the need personally.

The expression **“what is necessary for their body”** literally means “the necessities of the body.” We are not obligated to make sure people have a television or a cable hook up. We are not even obligated to provide a roof over their head. But, we are obligated to give what is necessary for the body. This means that we cannot allow a person, if we have the necessary resources, to go hungry or to be exposed to life threatening temperatures.

The rhetorical question, “what use it that?” implies the answer. The outrageous comment, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” is of no use at all, being totally worthless. Professed compassion without kindness and care is phony.

The story is told of a European queen, several centuries ago, who left her coachman sitting outside during the winter while she attended the theater. The drama was so heart wrenching that the queen sobbed throughout the entire performance, but when she returned to the carriage and discovered the coachman had frozen to death, she did not shed a tear. She was deeply moved by a fictional tragedy but completely untouched by a real one with which she was directly involved, and for which she was even directly responsible.

It is amazing that so many people can become emotionally involved in a movie, play, popular song or TV program, weeping over tragedies and becoming incensed at wrongs and injustices, and yet show no concern or compassion for the plight of a neighbor or a acquaintance who is in real need. In our artificial world, fantasy often becomes more meaningful than reality.

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How utterly different than the response of the early church. New Christians spontaneously, according to Acts 2:45, “**began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need**” (Acts 2:45). Then we see the same spirit again manifested in Acts 4:32-35, “**And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. (33) And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. (34) For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, (35) and lay them at the apostles feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.**”

Jesus spoke to this issue on several occasions, using words and imagery that are impossible to misunderstand. In the story of the Good Samaritan, He made clear that those who belong to Him are obligated to help anyone in need --- friend or stranger, fellow citizen or foreigner, admired or despised. As far as we are able, we are to seek to meet the need of anyone who crosses our path.

With this thought in mind, I would like again to emphasize the importance of discernment. The reason why discernment must be exercised is because the Scriptures appear to make it clear from Old Testament example and NT instruction that we should not feel any obligation to meet even the most basic needs of people who are bringing their miserable plight upon themselves by their own lethargy and unwillingness to act responsibly in light of the opportunities that are afforded them. Hopefully you remember **2 Thess. 3:10** which says, “**If anyone will not work neither let him eat.**” Attempting to balance our responsibilities of supply for the truly needy with our responsibility not to supply for the truly irresponsible can be tricky (2 Thess. 3:10). So, I would like to give you these following suggestions:

If you become aware of someone who is in need, and you view them as someone who is willing to take personal responsibility for improving their life situation, then you need to help them.

If you become aware of a person who represents themselves to you as needy, but you do not know that as a fact, and you also do not know them well enough to know if they are willing to take personal responsibility for improving their life situation, then you need to test them.

Tell them, that if they go to Valley Bible Church, they will be given food. Be sure when you tell them to go to Valley Bible Church give them a specific time to go to the church and make sure that it is during office hours. If they are truly hungry and willing to take personal responsibility for meeting their needs, they will put out the effort. But don't think that you are done. If you tell them to go to the church at a specific time, then you need to call the church and tell us what you have done. We will then be able to link arms with you in the work of meeting the genuine needs of people.

We want to encourage you to help the needy because the Scriptures encourages us to help the needy, and we want to assist you in that work. But we are not here to replace you. There is one more scenario.

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If you become aware of a person who represents themselves as needy but you believe that they have purposed to sustain themselves on the handouts of others without taking personal responsibility for meeting their own personal needs you have no personal responsibility to supply for them. In fact by extending “so-called help” you might be hurting them.

But having said this, we must go back to the emphasis of this passage. And the emphasis of this passage is not refusing people help but on extending assistance to those who are in genuine need, and particularly and most importantly, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus taught that His people have a special obligation to help each other. In fact, He said, to help fellow believers is to directly serve Him, and not to serve them is to forsake Him. In the day of judgment, that service or lack of it will be the mark that separates the sheep from the goats; those with true, living faith from those with false, dead faith. Those who enter the kingdom will not be those who merely professed the name of Jesus Christ but those whose lives of obedience and service to Him proved their profession was true.

Listen to these words from **Matt 25:31-41,45** **“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on his left.”**

Then the King will say to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.” Then the righteous will answer Him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink; and when did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” The King will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”

Then He will also say to those on His left, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.”

With this in mind, it is not surprising that James finishes what he has to say in vv. **15-17** with these words, **“Even so “faith,” if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.”** It is dead because it is not saving. Saving faith produces what? Works!

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CONCLUSION

The theme of this epistle is “Tests of a Living Faith.” The first test was the “Response to Trials test” in James 1:2-18. The second test was the “Response to the Word test” in James 1:19-27. The third test was “the Impartiality test” in James 2:1-13. Now we are considering the “The Works test” in James 2:14-26. In developing this test James will speak both about a dead faith and a living faith.

In VV. 14-20 James gives us the characteristics of a dead faith. The first characteristic is an “Empty confession” in V. 14. And the second characteristic that we have just examined is “False compassion.” Hopefully, the Spirit of God has taken His Word and impressed upon our hearts the importance in responding to human need, particularly within the body of Christ which is His church. Hopefully, because of this study this weekend, you will be very careful not to tell a fellow believer, who you view as responsible, that you will be praying for them but are unwilling to assist them when you have the resources to meet their basic needs.