

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 17 Text: 2:14-17 Date: 6-18-23

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(14) What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?

Can that faith save him?

(15) If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,

(16) and one of you says to them,

"Go in peace, be warmed and filled,"

without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

(17) So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

(Job 31:19; Mt 7:26; 23:1-6; 25:35; Lk 3:11; Acts 9:36-42;
Rom 2:6-11; 2 Cor 8:1-9; Gal 5:6; Eph 2:8-10; Php 2:12-16; Titus 2:7-14;
Heb 10:23-25; 1 Jn 3:17,18; Rev 14:12,13)



Commentary on James – "The Epistle of Faith" – Dr. David Scaer - CPH

These first Christians were so taken up in impressing the rich that they not only despised the poor in their worship services (2:1-7) but neglected to provide them with even the most elementary needs (2:14-17). On the other hand the rich, whom the early Christians were trying to impress, were responsible for the miseries of the poor (5:1-6). The failure of these early Christians to recognize the elemental needs of the poor for food and clothing and their alliance with the rich made them coconspirators in the misery and possibly even the starvation of the poor. Luther, who had little enthusiasm for James, saw with him that failure to help the neighbor in his bodily needs was breaking the commandment forbidding murder. The rich Jews to whom the Christians were catering were also responsible for the martyrdom of Stephen and for the persecution of other Christians in Palestine and Syria. This was hardly a subtle form of murder!³

James assesses faith without works from an eschatological perspective. A faith without works will not stand the test on the Day of Judgment. The word "save" (*sōsai*) is in the future tense and does not speak directly to Paul's concern of whether he is justified now. James, like Jesus, views man and his relationship to God from the perspective of the Last Day. In a sense there is a realized eschatology. The Kingdom's coming involves not only death and resurrection but judgment. This makes the call to repentance in the preaching of John the Baptist so urgent (Matt. 3:7-10). The perspective of James is not so much present faith as final salvation, that is, whether the Christian will be acceptable to God on the Last Day. This helps in understanding the scene of the Last Judgment in Matthew 25, a perspective introduced as early as the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus refuses salvation to the workers of iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23). This eschatological dimension so characteristic of James and so prominent in the New Testament era, beginning with John the Baptist (Matt. 3:7), is the development of a prophetic theme of the Old Testament. Found in the Psalms (98:9), the world judgment becomes prominent in the preaching of the later prophets (Hag. 2:6; Mal. 4:1).

“In the Treatise on Good Works, Luther presents an exposition of the Ten Commandments based **upon his theology of justification by faith alone**. This fits very well with Luther’s understanding of the First Commandment. First, he writes that true good works are those things that God actually commands in Scripture. Luther focuses his criticism throughout this text on religious activity promoted as good deeds of satisfaction by the papal theologians. Then Luther wrote this significant statement:

‘The first, highest, and most precious of all good works is faith in Christ, and as it says in John 6 [:28-29], when the Jews asked him, ‘What must we do, to be doing the good work of God?’ Jesus answered, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’ Now when we hear that or even preach it, we pass over it: we think nothing of it and think it easy to do, but actually we ought to pause a long time and think it over properly. For in this work all good works exist, and from faith these works receive a borrowed goodness. We must make this absolutely clear, so that men can understand it.’

Dr. Luther wrote explanations of each **of the Ten Commandments** throughout the rest of this treatise. **Here, he emphasizes the idea that obedience to the commandments only flows from faith in Christ and his redemptive action**. He concluded rhetorically in the following manner:

‘Look here! This is **how you must cultivate Christ in yourself**, and see how in him **God holds before you his mercy** and offers it to you without my prior merits of you own. It is from such a view of his grace that you must draw faith and confidence in the forgiveness of all sins. Faith, therefore, does not originate in works, neither do works create faith, but faith must spring up and from the blood and wounds and death of Christ. **If you see in these that God is so kindly disposed toward you that he even gives his own Son for you, then your heart in turn must grow sweet and disposed toward God.**”

**Martin Luther, Heidelberg Disputation, in Luther’s Works, vol. 31, pp. 55-56; Martin Brecht, Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis 1985), 231-234.*

<u>LIFE APPLICATION</u>

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION JOINED TOGETHER:

“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

(A good tree will always bear good fruit)

How do we in preaching, teaching and living, properly then, distinguish these three crucial truths from the Bible, that show us how God carefully deals with each one of us?