

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 18 Text: 2:18-26 Date: 7-9-23

Trinity Lutheran Church - Pastor David Nehrenz

www.tlcnorman.org

TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(18) But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.
(Mt 7:16,17; Rom 3:28; 4:6; Gal 5:6; Heb 11:33)

(19) You believe that **God is one**; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder!

(20) Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?
(Dt 6:4; Mt 8:29; Mk 1:24; 5:7; 12:29; Lk 4:33,34; Ac 16:17; 19:15; Rom 2:17-24; 1 Cor 8:4-6; Eph 4:6)

(21) Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

(22) You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;
(23) and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham **believed God**, and it was counted to him as righteousness"-- and he was called a **friend of God**.
(Gen 15:6; 22:9-12; 2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8; Mt 11:19; 12:33-37; Rom 4:3; Gal 2:15,16; 3:6; 5:6; 1 Th 1:3; Heb 11:17)

(24) You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

(25) And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

(26) For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.
(Gen 2:7; Josh 2:1-22; Mt 1:5; Heb 11:31)



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

What Christians were doing was hardly different from the devils who were intellectually aware of who God was, but shuddered at what God had in store for them.⁴ Again James introduces the eschatological element in that those with an unproductive confession will have to account for their vain religion. As in other matters, James in handling the subject of demons supposes that his audience is so theologically well-versed that he never engages in the theological details. If the tradition later placed in the gospels was known to James' readers, then those accounts in which demons recognized what Jesus could do and who He was were also known to them (Mark 1:23-24; 5:1-13). An audience who knew that demons were not ignorant that Jesus was God's Son would not have difficulty comprehending that these same demons were informed about the unity of God.

The phrase “You believe that God is one” is easily recognizable as being taken over from Deut. 6:4, the *Shema*, the basic creed for the Old Testament believer, maintained in early Christian worship. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” was used in an abbreviated form outside of Palestine (cf. 1-Cor. 8:6) and was carried over into the creeds of the early church. It survives in the Nicene Creed, which begins: “I believe in *one* God.” Clearly James is referring to the recitation of this ancient Old Testament creed within the regular worship of the Christian synagogue.³ There is no suggestion that James is taking exception to this traditional expression of Jewish orthodoxy which was completely accepted in the Christian community, as he commends the one making the confession (cf. Mark 12:28-30). The difficulty rests not in the confession itself but in the failure of that confession to come to proper expression within the Christian life.

Faith and Works (2:18)

The commentators have no agreement as to whom James is referring to as the speaker in the phrase, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works’” (2:18). Who is the objector?² If these words are addressed to James, they do not fit, as James holds that his faith is seen in his works. Regardless of who is raising the objection, James concludes that salvation as eschatologically rewarded by Christ the Judge is by faith which manifests itself in works. The works that James calls for are identical with those which Christ finds in the justified on Judgment Day (Matt 25:35-40).

James can hardly be seen as putting faith in a position lower than works, since he is intent on demonstrating that his faith is indeed alive. James wants to talk about faith, not works! “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith” (v. 18). Faith is the substance, and works are the characteristics of that substance. Let it be

repeated: This is an exposition on faith, not works. James is not here speaking to the question of the Christian’s own self-conscious awareness of faith so that he can convince himself of his acceptability before God now. Rather he is addressing the question of the Christian’s faith and its acceptability from the perspective of the Last Day. His present behavior will provide faith’s evidence for the Last Day and thus be determinative. James is making the standards of Judgment Day applicable to present behavior. The Christian performs his works, fully convinced that the line between today and the final day has been erased. Eschatology, Christ’s judgment, has become present reality in the Christian life.

Throughout this section James seems to be using liturgical language for theological purposes. As he made use of the peace formula of the Lord’s Supper, he makes use of the creed for his discussion on the nature of true faith.

LIFE APPLICATION

Note: Martin Luther had difficulties with the words of James here. He thought that James was contradicting Paul in saying that a person is justified not only by faith, but also by works. But since Scripture interprets Scripture, the simple way to understand this is that James is indicating that true faith **WILL** always be followed by good works, and **THAT** is what saving faith is. A good tree **WILL** always bear good fruit. So someone who claims to have faith, but has no good works – really doesn’t have faith at all.

How would you explain this to someone based on the distinction between justification and sanctification?