

## Faith Alive

“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

— James 2:26 (ESV)

In our Sunday School class this past weekend, we ended our discussion on the verse above, but we only had time to briefly touch on it. This is the capstone verse in James’ argument that attempts to wake the reader (or listener) of this letter to the reality that the Christian faith is a faith that cannot be separated from good works. It seems that James’ audience was struggling to put their faith into proper action and, although they claimed to have faith, their lives still evidenced behaviors that were indicative of a false faith. The analogy used by James to inextricably link faith and works is the relationship between spirit and body.

And it is a powerful (and painful) analogy. Death is such a visible evil to us. We know it in our head, but also deep in our heart, that once the spirit is removed from the body, something has been broken that we cannot repair. A complete person has their body and spirit working in full harmony and the two parts are intimately woven together into what we call “man.” The body apart from the spirit is not just a weaker version of a man, nor is a man without his spirit just of lesser value than a “spirited” man. No, a man without the spirit is a body alone and is of a new class; he is no longer alive, but *dead* and his body is of no value but to be buried the ground. Now, I believe it is right that we honor the physical body of the dead and that we prepare it for burial, but it is not the body apart from the spirit that has value in itself. We honor not the body devoid of spirit, but honor and remember the whole person in his or her fullness and completeness, and we look forward again to the resurrection day in which there will be a rejoining of the spirit and body in perfect unity!

Following James’ analogy, then, what good is faith without works? It is not a weaker version of faith, nor is it just a faith of lesser value than a “working” faith. Instead, it is a faith that is of no value and is already dead. James is emphasizing that a workless faith is a worthless faith. It not Christian faith at all. This faith without works should scare us when we encounter it, especially in ourselves.

Of course, we also know that we are not saved by works, even very “religious” works like strict obedience to the Law—a point that Paul makes strongly to both the Romans and Galatians. However, should be very concerned if we are resting comfortably in “faith” for salvation, but that faith does not evidence itself in our daily actions. In fact, Paul in his letter to the Ephesians even goes so far as to state that, having been saved by God’s grace through faith, we are now “God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*” (emphasis mine, Eph. 2:10). The good works are the goal of our salvation!

So how do we manifest these good works? We know from Scripture that all good is from God, as are even our good works themselves (see, for example, Phil. 2:13) and so I would argue that our best recourse to ensure we overflow with good works is to give ourselves over to a Spirit-filled life. **First**, look upward and inward and ensure you truly know the grace and love given you through gospel of Jesus Christ, that you believe it to be true, and (very importantly!) you surrender yourself fully to God and give your life in allegiance to our Lord Jesus. **Second**, look outward to the world around you. Awaken your senses to the ignorance, hatred, suffering, and brokenness around you. Don’t be taken in by these evils, but instead struggle against them and against sin with the power of the Spirit and of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Look forward to the day when evil will be banished for eternity, but until that day bring the truth and good news to others

and let the salve of God's truth provide true hope and relief from the suffering and pain of our broken world.

We can then, with a properly grounded faith and no risk of attempting to "earn" our salvation, we can evidence our faith by taking practical and, sometimes, difficult actions. What will these actions look like? I leave this as an exercise to the reader under the conviction of the Spirit, however I encourage you to note that the works demonstrated by the faithful examples in Scripture demonstrates lives focused on an eternal kingdom to come and these faithful works required effort, perseverance, and often great sacrifice of material pleasures or life itself. However, we can make these sacrifices eagerly if we truly understand the promises given us as God's adopted children and co-heirs with Jesus.

Finally, be encouraged by these words from Hebrews 12:1-3:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

May today and every day you demonstrate your faith to be alive!

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