

Sermon Notes

FAITH THAT DOES NOT SAVE

James 2:14-20

Introduction

- We must walk the talk.
- Sanctification is not just looking back to one's justification, with no real emphasis upon spiritual growth and godliness (Aquila Report, PCA).

Does James contradict Paul?

- The main subject of James's Epistle is not "work," but "faith." The whole Epistle is about testing of our faith in Jesus Christ.
- James and Paul used the same word "faith" and later "justification" with a slightly different meaning:
 1. The people James addresses is those whose belief or faith is purely intellectual faith. Paul was writing to the group who tried to keep the Law of Moses in order to gain heaven.
 2. They begin at different times in the Christian life. Paul begins at the very beginning. No man can ever earn the forgiveness of God. The initial step must come from the free grace of God. James begins much later with the professing Christian. He has been justified, so he must now show that he is sanctified. Faith always means true faith that "works through love" (Gal 5:6) to Paul, but to James, it has two meanings: dead and living faith.

Three marks of a dead faith

1. Dead faith lacks evidential work (verse 14).
 - When true faith is placed in Christ, we receive a new nature and that new nature will manifest itself.
 - Behaviour determines who we are.

- WCF 6:2: “These good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith.”
- Remark: outward righteousness of life or good work is not a sure evidence of faith. James started it with “faith in Jesus Christ” before good works. Our Confession mentions good works must be done in obedience to God’s commandments.

2. Dead faith is useless towards mankind (v 15-17).

- Similar teaching: 1 John 3:17,18, and the Parable of the Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-31).
- Matthew 21:28-31 – “A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” The chief priests and elders answered Jesus, “The first.”
- The point of the parable: ‘what counts is not promise but performance’ – France.
- Will it ever be wrong to strive after performance to do God’s will?
- Apostle Paul: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it” (1 Cor 9:24). What a great performance!
- Faith without performance is useless. James asks, “What good is that?”
- James’ illustration – the needy poor:
 - We have far more neighbours than we could ever hope to care for. Alec Motyer’s guide-lines: (1) we must each discover from God what is our calling; (2) we must respect each other’s callings; (3) we must enter into each other’s calling.

- More general applications:
 - Our faith is not an idealistic faith. Christians live in the world, not of perfection and equality, but of imperfections and full of inequalities. It is the imperfections of this world which provide a great opportunity to test the genuineness of our faith.
 - Our church is not a perfect church, but full of problems.
 - Before we can even ask the question on how effective our faith is towards mankind in general, perhaps it is more realistic that we should ask this simpler question, how effective is our faith towards our brethren here in this church?
3. Dead faith is ineffective towards God (v 18-19).
- James' argument: true faith cannot exist separately from works, and works acceptable in the sight of God cannot be performed without true faith.
 - Dead faith which is not accompanied with work is just like the faith of demons.
 - But worst, at least the demons understand the implications and in grave fear. Men do not fear God (Romans 3:18).
 - It is an intellectual faith that does not change life. It cannot save.
 - This kind of faith produces no peace with God. It is ineffective towards God.
 - A thought: Fear can never inspire obedience that pleases God. Thank God that there is now no more fear of God's wrath for those in Christ Jesus and we are free to love the Law and strive after conformity to the Law.

TO BE CONTINUED