

HOW TO KNOW YOUR FAITH IS REAL

James 2:14-26

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INTRODUCTION

- A. Do you like controversy? Some strange people do. Most of us don't.
 - 1. There's a serious controversy in James 2:14-26.
 - 2. It was serious enough for Martin Luther, the father of what we call the Protestant Reformation, to want to take the book of James out of the Bible.
- B. So, what's the controversy all about?
 - 1. Paul says very clearly and often that salvation is by faith alone-Ephesians 2:8-9.
 - 2. James, on the other hand, seems to be saying that we are saved not by faith alone, but by works-James 2:14 & 17.
- C. If this is so, then there is a serious contradiction between the teaching of Paul and that of James.

Relax, there is no such controversy when we consider how each man uses the word "faith". Let's consider several examples.

- 1. First, Paul is addressing the problem of "legalism"—the problem of believing all the Jewish laws and regulations must be kept to be a Christian. James, however, is addressing the problem of "laxity"—the problem of those who say it doesn't matter what you do as long as you believe.
 - 2. Second, when Paul uses the word "works" he's talking about the Jewish laws of circumcision and things like that. But when James uses the same word "works" he's talking about a Christian's lifestyle, i.e., acts of love, service and the like.
 - 3. Third, Paul focuses on the "root" of salvation, what happens to us on the inside. James, though, focuses on the "fruit" of salvation, what happens on the outside of us.
 - 4. Fourth, Paul is talking about "How to know you're a Christian". James, however, is talking about "How to show that you are a Christian."
 - 5. Fifth, Paul is talking about how to "become" a Christian. James is talking about how to "behave" like a Christian.
 - 6. Finally, Paul says we are saved by faith "alone" in Ephesians 2:8-9, but he goes on to say that real faith will never be "alone" in Ephesians 2:10. This is the main point James makes in this passage, therefore, there is no contradiction between them.
- D. James reveals in this passage four ways to know your faith is real, by his definition and also Paul's.

I. FIRST, REAL FAITH ISN'T JUST SOMETHING YOU SAY.

- A. A lot of people can talk about being a Christian and not actually be a Christian. They know the right words to say, but they don't know Jesus-2:14.
- B. According to a recent "U.S. News and World Report" article, 84% of Americans consider themselves to be Christians, but you don't see any evidence of their claim in their lifestyles
- C. Jesus says its not enough to "talk the talk"-Matthew 7:21.

II. SECOND, REAL FAITH ISN'T JUST SOMETHING YOU FEEL.

- A. It's not just an emotional feeling-2:15-16.
- B. John says the same thing-I John 3:17.

III. THIRD, REAL FAITH ISN'T JUST SOMETHING YOU THINK.

- A. Just saying you believe in God, Jesus, the Bible, an afterlife, etc, isn't going to get you into heaven.
- B. This is what James says-2:19.

IV. FOURTH, REAL FAITH IS SOMETHING YOU DO.

- A. James' point is that faith is active, not passive.
- B. He offers two illustrations that are polar opposites to prove his point.
 - 1. Abraham's faith was active not passive-2:20-22.

2. Rahab's faith was also active not passive-2:25 (Joshua 2).
- C. The point of both illustrations, and indeed James' entire discussion of the subject, is summarized in two sentences.
 1. One, faith is not determined by what we do.
 2. Two, our faith, however, is demonstrated by what we do.

CONCLUSION

- A. What kind of faith do you have? Is it the real thing?
- B. Unfortunately a lot of good people are going to go to hell because their faith isn't real.
- C. Remember, our behavior is a reflection of what we truly believe.