

**“ROLE OF FAITH AND WORKS”**  
**James 2:14-17**  
**Holiday Island Presbyterian Church**  
**September 9, 2018**

**James 2:14 – 17**

**What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?**

**So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**James asks the question:**

**2:14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?**

**Paul’s answer to that question is Ephesians 2:8-9:**

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.**

**The Presbyterian answer is that of Luther’s –**

**- *sola fide***

**- by faith alone**

**And I believe that almost every Christian would answer the question: How are we saved?  
by saying we are saved by faith.**

**But . . . most Christians wrestle with the thought that we must be “good” in order to “get into heaven.”**

**I have heard folks say:**

**“I need to clean up my act and go to church  
or else I am heading to Hell.”**

**At the heart of Catholicism is good works.**

**You must do penance for your sin  
by balancing it out with good works.**

**So, on the surface,**

**we have what seems like a dichotomy:  
faith vs. works; works vs. faith.**

**On the surface,**

**it looks like there is a conflict between Paul and James  
in the theology of salvation.**

**However, when you take the *whole* of what Paul said**

**and the *whole* of what James said,  
they are in complete agreement.**

**In James 1:22-27,**

**James tells his readers not to “simply be hearers of the word,  
but doers. . .”**

**Religion which is not put into practice**

**has as much value as items sold at a garage sale.**

**While the Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by faith alone,**

**it is also clear that true faith  
will always be evidenced by good works  
or “fruit” of some kind.**

**You’ve heard the old expression:**

**If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck,**

**walks and swims like a duck,  
it probably is a duck.**

**If a person who has accepted Christ as savior,  
but never allows that profession of faith to produce works,  
one should probably wonder  
if the transformation ever took place.**

**That's all James is saying.**

**JAMES' ARGUMENT:**

**James advances his argument with three examples of dead faith,  
which are very helpful in understanding his meaning.  
The first example is of someone who professes to believe,  
but never actually does anything to care for his neighbor.**

**James is asking if such a person could possibly have a saving faith.**

**James is not questioning if we're saved by faith,  
he is questioning whether a sincere faith  
can lack any outer manifestation of it.**

**James is using a hypothetical example  
of a person who never shows the fruit of love  
and suggests that maybe that person's faith  
is just as hypothetical as the example itself.**

**The second example is that of demons.**

**Down in verse 19, James says:**

**“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons  
believe that—and shudder.”**

**Even the demons believe in God,  
but they lack a saving faith**

**and they lack the capacity for an *active* faith;  
faith that manifests itself in good works.**

**Why?**

**Because saving faith is more than intellectual knowledge  
or believing something is true.**

**There must be an active component of trust  
that finds its expression in obedience.**

**Satan knows that Jesus is Lord, he simply won't bow.**

**The third example of dead faith comes in the form of a metaphor.**

**In verse 26, James says:**

**“as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works  
is dead.”**

**James' makes the relationship between faith and works explicit:  
It's impossible to think of a body moving around  
that doesn't have life in it;**

**Equally bizarre would be a supposedly “living” body - saving faith -  
that never moves – never produces fruit.**

**Let me use a dangerous illustration here.**

**Think about a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup.**

**Wow! I just lost almost everyone's attention –  
- you're all thinking about Reese's Peanut Butter Cups  
instead of what I was just saying.**

**OK, now try to pay attention . . .**

**The peanut butter and the chocolate go hand-in-hand**

**if either ingredient is lacking,  
it would still be good . . .  
. . . it just wouldn't be a Peanut Butter Cup.**

**Paul Tillich would be very proud of me using that illustration!**

**Works and faith are an interconnected duality.**

- works can – and do - exist without faith**
- but faith cannot exist without producing works.**

**Work – even the best work - does not inform or transform faith;  
however, faith does inform and transform works.**

### **WORKS GENERATED BY FAITH:**

**James said:**

**15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?**

**James compares such faith to “words of love and comfort”  
offered to someone who is cold and hungry.**

**Such words are meaningless  
if not accompanied by actions  
to feed and clothe the person in need.**

**It may be a nice thing to say,  
it may be a compassionate thing to say,  
but it does absolutely nothing to relieve the situation.**

**In the Summa Theologica,  
Thomas Aquinas discusses the division of life  
into active and contemplative dimensions.**

**Aquinas says that the contemplative life**

**of someone who withdraws from the world  
to pray and concentrate on God and Godly things  
is better than toiling to please God.**

**Although Aquinas upholds the traditional understanding  
that the contemplative life is better than the active one,  
he makes the extraordinary assertion  
that a “mixed” life has supremacy.**

**Aquinas believed that a life with a balance  
between faith and works is the best life a person can live.**

**Aquinas explains that the work of a mixed life this way:  
“One proceeds from the fullness of contemplation such as  
teaching and preaching... and this work is more excellent than  
simple contemplation.” However, “[f]or even as it is better to  
enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others  
the fruits of one’s contemplation than merely to contemplate.”**

**Let me ask you a question:  
Which do you think is more important –  
- the *work* you do  
- or the *motivation* for doing the work?**

**Why would an all-powerful God  
be even remotely interested in the *results* of our labor?  
It is not the results God is judging,  
it the motivation behind the work.**

**By no means does that mean works have no value  
either to God or to humanity.  
Even the labor provided even by an atheist has value.**

**A non-believer can work just as hard as a believer**

**on a Habitat-for-Humanity house.**

**The new owner will not know – and may not care –  
which portion of the house was built by a Christian  
and which was built by a non-Christian.**

**The non-believer will feel good  
because he/she has done something good for someone else.**

**The Christian has an added dimension:  
not only have they done something good for someone else,  
they have also honored God in the process.**

**To the listener, a symphony that is written  
- to bring honor, glory and fame to the composer  
sounds *exactly* like the symphony  
that is written as an expression of art.**

**Either of these symphonies  
will sound *exactly* like a symphony  
composed using the gifts God gave the composer  
and which was written as a *response* to God's grace  
in the composer's life.**

**They all sound *exactly* the same.**

**But there is a massive spiritual difference!  
Maybe not in the life of the listener,  
but certainly in the life of the composer!**

### **THEOLOGY OF WORKS:**

**There is a verse in Ephesians  
that I have encourage the elders to memorize.**

**Ephesians 4:12:**

**“[the calling and duty of an elder] is to equip God’s people to do the work of ministry/service.”**

**Work is actually a gift and a calling from God.**

**It just doesn’t make much sense  
that God would give us spiritual gifts  
and then not expect us to use them –  
to put them to work.**

**Spiritual gifts – by their very nature –  
are for the benefit of others.**

**Of course, there is always a benefit to us  
when we employ those gifts –  
a sense of well-being and spiritual fulfilment  
as we use those gifts.  
Knowing we are in the will of God.**

**But the primary benefit of using our gifts  
is for the benefit of others.**

**CONCLUSION:**

**What I am saying is simply this:**

**If you have accepted the gift – and responsibility –  
of being a Christian,  
that should be the primary motivation  
for the work you do.**

**We do good things  
because we believe that God has *called* us to do good things.**



- not because it is the *right* thing to do
- not because it *benefits* others
- not because it is good for humanity

We do it as a *response* to God.

I have noticed lately

that some customer support folks will end the call with “Have a blessed day.”

I am touched when they say that.

We start every worship service with

“May the Lord be with you.”

What would happen if we used that phrase outside the church?

What if we began saying:

“Thank you, and may the Lord be with you.”

Now here’s a radical thought – and a challenge:

How about when the servers hand over a plate of spaghetti, they say: “May the Lord be with you.”

Faith creates works; works don’t create faith.

### PRAYER:

Most Loving and Eternal God, strengthen our faith so that we can do those works You have called us to do. Increase our understanding so we will understand why we do good works in Your name. Grant us the wisdom to carry out Your will in our lives. And bless us mightily. In Jesus’ name. Amen.