

## Mid-Week Lent 2 / March 11, 2020

### James Chapter 2

#### Faith Works

James chapter two was the most controversial part of scripture in the debates between Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Roman Catholic theologians contended that in contrast to the Protestant teaching of justification by grace through faith alone, this chapter of James plainly teaches that justification is by faith and works. After offering the example of Abraham's obedience James plainly says, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." The critical theologians of the 18th and following centuries, also seized on James' views expressed in this chapter, to prove that the scriptures are not inerrant and do not present a unified theology. In Romans 3:28 St. Paul wrote: "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." While St. James asks, "What good is it my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" Seems like an obvious contradiction and difference of religion.

But the contradiction is more apparent than real. In fact there is no contradiction or disagreement, in the theology of James and Paul. In the passages quoted, they are speaking about two different aspects of the Christian life; justification and sanctification. Justification is the act by which God blesses us with His grace, received through faith in Christ Jesus and declares us forgiven. Justification is God's action in the human soul from beginning to end. It is the first resurrection of the spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. It will be made full when God calls us from the dust of death, to rise in Christ to a new and eternal life. In Ephesians chapter two Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

But God's grace received through faith, always has an effect in the believer's life. In Romans chapter six, Paul writes about the effect God's grace given in baptism has in our lives, both in terms of our relationship with God and our relationship with others. He says, "We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we

too might walk in newness of life." God justifies us by grace through faith in Christ, so that we may walk in newness of life. This newness of life, called 'sanctification', is what James is writing about in this chapter and throughout this letter. He is urging people who have been justified by grace to walk in the newness of life; by avoiding sin and doing what is right according to God's royal law! A real and living faith naturally and spontaneously expresses itself in thanksgiving to God and acts of love towards others. The Spirit implants the seed of faith in our hearts through the gospel, waters it in baptism, nourishes and give it growth through the body and blood of Christ in Holy Communion, so that we may produce the fruit of faith by loving the Lord our God with our whole heart and loving our neighbours as ourselves.

James is urging us to consciously and intentionally express our faith in acts of love, according to the guidance of the law of liberty. Even though we are justified by grace received through faith, we still have a sinful nature that wants to indulge itself and do as little as possible in response to God and for others. This part of us needs to be told not to favour the rich over the poor. This part of us needs to be told that the commandments apply to us. Because of our sinful nature, we need to apply ourselves to God's grace so our faith may remain alive and be expressed in acts of love towards God and others. Like a dead body, a dead faith has no movement. Life makes itself known in movement. A living faith always expresses itself in movement towards God and towards others.

This is not a conflict between faith and works. It is a reminder that faith works; both for our justification and our sanctification. As Paul said in the letter to the Galatians, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”  
In Jesus’ Name. Amen