

Colossians 2: “6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, bounding in it with thanksgiving.

Ephesians 2: “4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Walking in an Obedient Faith

As promised, today I want to address some issues regarding faith and obedience following our lunch discussion a couple of weeks ago. Both texts I read speak about our walk with Christ, as does James 2 which we will consider in a moment.

- **First, I want to suggest a common Biblical image that can help us understand how and why the Bible calls those who are saved to walk in an obedient faith!**

I want us to think of the Christian life as a journey on a road! It has a beginning and it has a destination.

- **And if we faithfully journey down that road we will reach the glorious destination God has in mind for us!**

Both our texts from Ephesians & Colossians spoke about walking by faith in the good works God created us to walk in! And we can think of many other Biblical examples of running the race, walking in the way or encouragements to stay on the right path.

As we consider this Biblical road, we would find some ditches to avoid: On the one side a ditch that is legalism where we join with the Pharisees, thinking that keeping this or that man-made rule gets us down the road but actually leads to unbearable burdens.

In that ditch folks are enslaved in bondage to Unbiblical rules that keep them from enjoying this Christian journey in all the abundance of life that Jesus promised.

- **The other ditch is what Pastor Liberati covered from Romans 6, where folks say, ‘hey I have my salvation, my ticket to heaven is right here in my pocket, so now I can do what ever I want on the journey!**
- **Lawlessness which must be avoided!**

Pastor Liberati also touched on a third problem which is not accepting that the journey is on the right road! That would be someone wanting to go back and take another road: This is why we find the warnings in Hebrews about going back to the Old Covenant sacrifices, or the Apostle Paul’s strong warnings about ‘another gospel in Galatians. We enter this glorious road by faith, and we journey along this road by faith walking in the good works we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in.

- **Now while my illustration might seem simple enough, we can run into some controversy by speaking about faith and works in the Christian journey.**

In fact, there is so much controversy in some reformed circles today that you can get in trouble just using the words ‘faith’ and ‘works’ in the same sentence!

To me these controversies are not much different from the battles that raged in evangelical circles forty and fifty years ago when the debate was whether you must have Jesus as your Lord as well as your Savior. Saying you had to do both was called “Lordship Salvation.”

- **Folks holding that view insisted that if someone were truly saved, they should bow the knee to Jesus as Lord by keeping His commandments, and sadly they were often accused of adding works to salvation by grace!**
- **Today in some Reformed circles, if you say that those who have faith will obey Jesus, doing the good works they were created in Christ Jesus to walk in, then you are denying the great reformation doctrine of salvation by faith alone.**

In both cases I believe the confusion comes from not remembering, or believing, what the Bible means when it says someone is born-again or saved by faith.

When the Scriptures speak of such faith, saving faith, it is clearly:

- **NOT some sort of faith we have produced on our own**
- **NOT some sort of decision we have made**
- **NOT some sort of human will-power to overcome sin & temptation**
- **NOT some list of faithful works we do to merit, earn, or continue in our salvation**
- **Our salvation is the result of our sovereign God graciously giving us new hearts by which we repent and are justified, what Jesus described as the new birth.**
- **The gracious gift of salvation is the result of God’s love & actions from start to finish, and it puts us on a new road, with new life taking us to a glorious destination!**

We see this clearly in the passage I read from Colossians 2: “6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, bounding in it with thanksgiving.”

The Apostle here speaks about faith and works, in the same way Jesus does when He tells His disciples, and all of us, IF you love Me, keep my Commandments.

As we will see in James 2, saving faith is always an obedient faith that is alive!

- **At the same time, the writers of the NT stand united in declaring that NO ONE is saved by the “works of the law” or by any other type of human effort.**

A Biblical balance that must be held:

- **Even Martin Luther, who referred to James as an epistle of straw, still agreed & taught that saving faith was a lively faith!**

Listen to what Luther said about saving faith in his introduction to the book of Romans: “Oh, it is a living, active, energetic, mighty thing, this faith, so that it is impossible that it should not work what is good without intermission. It does not even ask whether good works are to be done, but before one asks it has done them, and is ever doing. But he who does not do such works is a man without faith...”

With all that in mind, let us dig into our text for today from James 2:

James asks a very simple question at verse 14 and then gives a simple and direct answer in the verse 26: At verse 14, he asks, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” And he gives the answer at verse 26:

- **“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also”**

In verse 14 James is challenging someone with empty faith: “if someone says he has faith but does not have works”. James goes on to ask: “Can that faith save him?” Or more plainly, can this dead faith save him?

James goes on to give a very clear and easily understood example, in Verses 15-17, which confirms that this is what he is asking and teaching: “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

It would be difficult to give a simpler example or have the lesson be more clear:

- **With this simple example, James demonstrates that empty faith is...
EMPTY!**

James uses compassion to illustrate saving faith: I announce to the world that I am a compassionate person:

- **Is this true, someone might ask?**

The test comes when I encounter someone in need...

- **Do I provide what they need?**

Or do I simply SAY be comfortable and have a nice day!

- **Such “compassion” is DEAD compassion & what James is saying here is that faith that does not result in good works, is dead faith.**

James then tells us how we are to demonstrate our saving faith in verses 18-19:

“But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

- **How does one explain or show that they have true saving faith?**

The Bible says that it will be through baptism and obedience, neither of which save us, but both demonstrate how we have a living & obedient faith.

- **Think about the illustration of compassion as we consider other Biblical examples of saving faith must be an obedient faith:**

Consider how John the Baptist confronted those proud Pharisees & Sadducees who came to his ministry:

"Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."

- **We are not saved because we were born in the right nation, or family or even the right church.**

Listen to how Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock"

Or in the Great Commission:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you"

And such obedient faith is exactly what we see when thousands are saved after the Apostle Peter's great sermon at Pentecost: "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."

- **In other words, those who receive the gift of faith respond with repentance and trust but also with the works they were created in Christ Jesus to walk in!**

James says that those who do not show works have an empty faith, & to show how serious he is, he now compares them to the demons!

"You believe there is one God.

You do well" [*the doctrine is right*] BUT James adds: "Even the demons believe & tremble"

A "decision" for Christ or the "right theology" is NOT enough.

- **Sadly, some who cling to a decision card or even a statement of faith today do not even bother to tremble!**

You see, Biblically, the Evangelical conflict over having Jesus as Savior or as Lord was a false dichotomy:

- **You must have Jesus as Savior AND you are to serve Him as your Lord!**

And this principle is an important part of the Reformed traditions!

The Heidelberg Catechism in the section on "Our Thankfulness" certainly agrees with James when making his case that faith without works is a dead faith!

The Heidelberg Catechism at Question 86 asks this:

"Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?"

And the Answer is given as: Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after His own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ."

- **The bottom-line: We are justified by the gift of saving faith from the Holy Spirit, which is always and only an active and obedient faith!**

James goes on to confirm his teaching with two familiar Old Testament examples: Abraham & Rahab! And this is where we can really get into trouble with those who fear to use Biblical language!

Verses 20-24: “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

- **The faith of Abraham was an obedient faith & is the example of the saving faith that we need & should demonstrate in our Christian journey.**

In Verse 22, James clearly explains that it is God who brings faith to the intended goal of good works when he says that Abraham’s faith was working together with his works, and by works his faith was made perfect.

- **We see in Abraham the works of faith, NOT someone who is working to have faith...**
- **It is vital that we understand the difference! [let me repeat that]**

The portion Hebrews 11, which we read this afternoon, gave us many more examples of saving faith:

- **And we should reflect on how they are all coupled with obedient actions!**
- **8: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance**
- **20: By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come**
- **21: By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph**
- **23: By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents**
- **24: By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter**
- **28: By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood**
- **29: By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land**
- **30: By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days**
- **By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.**
- **And Rahab is also the final example that James uses in his discussion of saving faith:**

Verse 25: “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?”

After these examples, in verse 26, James answers the important question he asked back in verse 14 about a faith that had no works: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

- **Faith without works is dead!**

Yes, there are many who are not comfortable with the straightforward answer James gives here. And it can be easy to miss how James presents this truth because of our modern rationalisms or pietism:

➤ **Absent breath, the body is dead & absent works, your faith is dead.**

Pay special attention to how James relates works to breath rather than the body! Just as James showed from the examples of Abraham and Rahab, it is our good works in Christ that give life to our faith, which we placed in Christ.

We must always be those who desire and seek Biblical saving faith, saving faith from the Spirit that is active & obedient. Will we obey perfectly or even always consistently... NO!

What I want us to take away in our minds today is that Christian road I suggested we should be on!

Jesus said He is the way, the Truth and the Life! He is the only way, and that leaves us with only one right road. And the road that lies before those who have trusted in Him is a glorious road filled with faith and works, with faith and obedience, and abundant life!

We must avoid the ditch of legalism on the one side, & the ditch of lawlessness, doing whatever we want, on the other!

➤ **And heaven forbid that we should ever want to go back & try a different journey, rather than staying with Jesus on the True Christian road to eternal life.**

And brothers and sisters, I have more good news about how we are to journey on this glorious road.

I am pleased to announce that we have NO lack of information about what our journey on that road should be like in the Revelation that God has given us!

We have a road map & tour guide right here between these covers! [mention Psalms and Proverbs readings] As part of our text we read, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, bounding in it with thanksgiving.”

When we read on a bit in Colossians we find a simple, and challenging, call to action for the Christian journey to our glorious destination:

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Communion Meditation:

Christ has prepared His feast for us this afternoon : The example of Abraham and Rahab are used both by James and Hebrews which is teaching us in part that the good news of the “new covenant in my blood” really is universal. A comforting message for our age, that God’s gracious gift of faith in Christ can be celebrated at the Table by everyone: Male & female - Jew & Gentile - Rich & Poor - Free & slave - “righteous” & “sinful” - Mature & novice - Old & young