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^A Romans 3:28, 4:5, 11:6; Galatians 2:21, Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 John 3

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A. Introduction

1. What Makes Faith Real?

- a. In 1958, America’s first commercial jet air service began with the flight of the Boeing 707. A month after that first flight, a traveller on a piston-engine, propeller-driven DC-6 airliner struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger. The passenger happened to be a Boeing engineer. The traveller asked the engineer about the new jet aircraft, whereupon the engineer began speaking at length about the extensive testing Boeing had done on the jet engine before bringing it into commercial service. He recounted Boeing’s experience with engines, from the B-17 to the B-52. When his travelling companion asked him if he himself had yet flown on the new 707 jet airliner, the engineer replied, ‘I think I’ll wait until it’s been in service awhile.’—{2}.
- b. faith is not made real by a lot of talking
- c. faith is made real by entrusting your life to the object of that faith
- d. and that Object for a person to receive salvation is Jesus Christ

2. Salvation is Through Faith

- a. it was eminently clear to the New Testament church that salvation is in no way dependent upon our works
 - (A) Luther’s ‘by faith alone’ was the great reformation rallying cry
 - (B) though those exact words are not found in Scripture, the truth of them certainly is
 - (C) ‘For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.’ (Romans 3:28) – ‘apart from’ means ‘without works’
 - (D) Romans 4:5, ‘But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness’
 - (E) ‘But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.’ (Romans 11:6)
 - (F) ‘I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.’ (Galatians 2:21)

- (G) 'For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.' (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- (H) this is the gospel message; James heard this message from Paul as Acts 15 shows and it formed the basis of his letter to Gentile Christians that is recorded in that chapter
- b. yet today we are entering a part of James' letter to Christians that has confused many and been used to teach error by others
 - (A) for in each of verses 14, 17, 24, and 26 James says that faith which is unaccompanied by works is dead and useless
 - (B) so many have found in these words a contradiction
 - (C) and yet read carefully, we find no such thing; no inconsistency between the words of Paul and James, or for that matter, those of John which we read a few minutes ago from 1 John 3.
 - (D) James is speaking to believers – note his continued and repeated use of the term 'brethren' and even 'beloved brethren' – and he is dealing not with the way of salvation but its necessary results, as well as the collective responsibility of Christians in this light
 - (E) and if those results are absent, he concludes that so is salvation
 - (F) even as Paul concludes in Ephesians 2:10, 'For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.'
 - (G) before looking at what James has to say, let us consider

3. The Basis of Salvation

- a. think back for a moment on those verses on faith we just quoted
 - (A) two words describes faith's part in salvation: by and through
 - (B) in God's account books, there is no credit given for works
 - (C) that needed credit – which the Bible calls justification – is by faith
 - (D) it is by faith, for faith is the divinely chosen means whereby we are able to receive Christ and apprehend, take hold of, salvation
 - (E) but it is also through faith
 - (F) faith is the channel through which we can know the unknowable God – as Hebrews 11:6 tells us, 'And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is

and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.'

- (G) in this sense, faith is the cord that ties us to God
- (H) so faith is both a means and a conduit
- b. but faith is not the basis of our salvation
 - (A) my faith and your faith are both weak due to our humanity
 - (B) our faith wavers depending upon circumstances and events
 - (C) our faith, even though God-given, is imperfect
 - (D) as Charlotte Elliott describes it

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come! ^{—{3}}.

- (E) no, our salvation is based upon something far more substantial
- c. our salvation, like that promised by every other religion, is based upon works, works that satisfy the righteousness of God
- d. yes, you heard me right: Christian salvation is based on works!
- e. 'the unique message of the Christian religion alone is that salvation comes by the works of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, not by sinners' works. It is the sum of His righteous works of obedience to God's royal law which is imputed to all who are joined to Him by faith. The righteous judgment of God which the Lamb of God suffered in our place on Golgotha – because of our lack of good works and because of our abundance of bad works – is the utterly adequate basis for His peoples' salvation. That is Christianity. Christ's active and passive works of obedience redeem all who receive Him by faith.'^{—{4}}.
- f. with this background, I think that what James has to say will now fall clearly into place

B. The Opening Premise – Not All Faith Saves 2:14

1. What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

2. What He Says

a. James does not write that this person has faith

- b. James is writing about someone who says he has faith
- c. and there is a world of difference between professing and possessing
- d. this person claims faith; but what kind is it – we shall see

3. The Nature of His Faith

- a. the Greek is not 'he has the faith' but 'he has faith' – it is non-specific
- b. used without the definite article, 'the', may mean he thinks of faith as an abstract quality – much the same as a person saying, 'I have hope' but without any specify reference to what that hope entails or expects
- c. or, it can mean that he gives mental agreement to a set of dogmas
- d. or even, as many use it today, that he has religion – of what nature or kind is unspecified
- e. but regardless of which of these it is he claims, one thing is abundantly clear concerning his faith – there are no visible results, no action
- f. he has forgotten the truth that 'An old country preacher used to say: "There are two parts to the Gospel. The first part is believing it, and the second part is behaving it."'—{5}.

4. The Value of His Faith

- a. last part of this verse is literally, 'Is the faith able to save him?'
- b. and this time it contains the definite article – in the Greek, its use in this structure is to make a definite reference back to the type of faith just described – to such a faith without any accompanying works
- c. the way James words this tells us two things quite clearly
 - (A) yes, faith is necessary for salvation: it is the means and conduit
 - (B) but not the type of faith just described
- d. and to show how useless such a faith is he cites

C. The Ghastly Illustration – Sibling Indifference 2:15-16

- 1. If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

2. A Situation of Extremity

- a. **'without clothing'** could have its literal meaning of being totally naked
 - (A) or given what follows it could simply mean poorly clad
 - (B) or, like Peter when he was fishing, as being in his undergarments, but not wearing a cloak
 - (C) but the point is that this brother or sister is without one of the prime necessities of life, that of personal shelter and dignity
- b. **'in need of daily food'** is not merely living on short rations
 - (A) this is a person lacking that which is needed for each day
 - (B) they are destitute, left without food, and, in the Greek the word for **'in need'** conveys a picture of being forsaken and abandoned
- c. the addition of the word sister here – unique in the Bible in reference to a Christian woman – that one so weak and helpless excited no pity nor action, highlights the abject condition described

3. Words, Words, Only Words

- a. James begins to make this personal – one of you sees this; and how does he respond?
- b. **Baseball season is back and after the Blue Jay game radio broadcast, fans have a chance to call in to talk with Mike Wilner about the game**
 - (A) I haven't heard it happen yet this season but it has in the past
 - (B) someone will call, and begin with a rush of words: 'Hi Mike! how are you? what did you think of so-and-so doing ...'
 - (C) then Mike would interrupt and say, 'wait a second; you asked me how I am; well, I am fine, thank you. Now what is your question?'
 - (D) we are very prone to give these greetings and farewell with no further thought nor concern. ^{—{6}}.
- c. that is what the response is here – just a customary combination of greeting and farewell
 - (A) 'Depart in peace, be comfy warm and full of food'
 - (B) in form it shows interest; in form it is a blessing
 - (C) maybe it expresses a wish that God would do something
 - (D) but that is as far as it goes

4. Such Words Are Profitless

- a. but if 'ye' – and James turns from the one individual who sees the need and makes this indifferent response to the needy brother or sister – he turns to the church as a whole, those who are reading this letter, these he points out have a responsibility to this needy one
- b. and if neither the individual nor the church respond
- c. then all the good words are useless
- d. that is the illustration in the realm of love; apply this now giving

D. The Conclusion – Such Faith Is Dead. 2:17

1. Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

2. Life Means Activity

- a. one of our lessons with the Cubbies in Awana has to do with their deciding whether something is alive or not
 - (A) we bring in various objects
 - (B) on the one hand, an insect in a bottle, a plant, and so on
 - (C) on the other, a stone, a piece of wood, etc
 - (D) and we ask, 'is this alive or not alive? and, how do you know?
 - (E) at 3 or 4 years old, they know it is alive because it is growing, or it is moving
- b. if love is alive, then the situation just described will not be left without a remedy – action will be take; that is the nature of love
- c. if faith is alive, then works will be its fruit; there is no alternative

3. Living Faith Means Works

- a. real faith is not an abstraction
- b. real faith is not a mental assent to some truth
- c. real faith cannot exist in a vacuum
- d. born again faith produces born again actions

E. Conclusion

1. don't forget the Noah principle:

a. 'predicting rain doesn't count, building arks does.'

2. Jesus said, 'If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.' (John 13:17)

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
- EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
- Lange – Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
- NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
- TYN – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. Heard on National Public Radio’s “Morning Edition” on November 2, 1988 – Kerux illustration #1890.
3. ‘*Just As I Am,*’ by Charlotte Elliott, (1789-1871)
4. ‘*Faith Without Works Is Dead,*’ by Rev Geoff Thomas (slightly altered)– Kerux sermons #2381
5. ‘*Two Parts of the Gospel,*’ – Kerux illustration #31408
6. Heard on the FAN 590 radio station in Toronto