

Faith that Works

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Faith is a complex concept. It can be expressed mainly in two ways. First, faith is a system of belief. The Gospel is a system of belief. The system concerns what the Creator has done for us through Jesus and by the Spirit. The faith is a fixed point that can be observed and learned. For example, Paul strengthened Christians by encouraging them to “continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Second, faith is a belief that produces trust, obedience, and transformation. Faith in God stirs us to learn about what He has done for us through the Gospel. Faith in Jesus compels us to obey Him as our Lord. Faith in the Spirit prompts us to follow Him to new life. For example, when Paul’s life was at risk at sea, God promised that he and his shipmates would be saved. Paul expressed his confidence in God to save them: “So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told” (Acts 27:25).

When we properly understand these two aspects of faith, we can better understand how faith is to shape our lives. The Bible guides us to a faith that works. James famously wrote, “...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas. 2:17). He was trying to impress readers with how their belief in the Gospel was to affect their lives. James was in effect asking, “If you believe the Gospel, can you ignore the least among you?”

Does a person truly have faith if their faith does not motivate them to serve and obey? James’ conclusion is simple: “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead” (Jas. 2:26).

More than the origin of faith, James considers the results of faith. He urges his readers to analyze the results being produced by their faith. We would be wise to do the same. In this article, we will consider features of a faith that works.

1. Faith that works transforms. Faith is personal. There is nothing more personal than our beliefs. Faith is consequential. Belief in God is intended to change us. As faith is given life within us, we will begin to adopt the values of God. We will become like Him in our character. This takes work.

The apostle Peter instructed readers to become partakers of divine nature. We are to become like God by changing the sinful desire of our hearts (2 Pet. 1:4). This is our lifelong pursuit. As daunting a challenge as this may seem, Peter offered a manageable process for us to use to change our character. He identified specific attributes that we are to incorporate into our faith.

For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with

love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

2. Faith that works stabilizes. Faith in God is designed to be used as a solid foundation for life in this world. When unexpected events occur in our lives, faith offers stability. Unlike this world, God is unchanging and reliable.

Life tests us. Life exposes what is in our hearts and minds. Life can be crushing. What can be done in a time of crisis? We can trust God to guide and protect us. We can endure the trials of faith with the knowledge of God's unchanging promise of eternal life. Faith that stabilizes brings hope.

So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul..." (Heb. 6:17-19).

3. Faith that works serves. Earlier in James' letter, he described pure religion. He wrote, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (Jas. 1:27). The religion that God established for the world is about service and purity. Therefore, faith in God that is unaccompanied by service is not faith.

Faith is about believing in a God who lowered Himself to an inferior level and served them by sacrificing Himself. Therefore, if we believe in this God, we too must humble ourselves to serve others. Service is how we show our faith. Service is how we help lead others to a loving, self-giving God.

4. Faith that works shares. When we begin to experience a faith that works, we will want to share that faith with others. Our faith is intended to be shared. This does not mean that others can borrow our faith, or that our faith can be transferred to another. Sharing our faith is about directing people to the faith.

We must teach others the Gospel. This must be done with truth, conviction, and a godly example. When faith works to change our character, give us stability, and make us servants, our message will become even more influential. Others can hear and see what they could become through faith.

Conclusion

Is your faith in the Gospel motivating you to change your character? Is the hope of the Gospel bring stability to your life when coping with hardships? Is the self-giving love of Jesus humbling you to serve others? Do you have a faith worth sharing? In other words, do you have a faith that works?