

Men to Men Ministry
Lesson 10 in the Letter of James
Decaffeinated Salvation

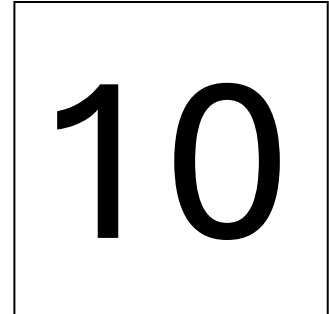
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James 2:14-17 NASB

14 What use is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

17 In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

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I want you to think for yourselves. It is not enough for you to just listen to me and nod your head in agreement. All my deep digging is no substitute for your own study and working out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

When I ask a question, I do not want a pat answer. I do not want a simple yes or no. That is just too easy. You have a 50% chance of being right and sooner or later your odds will even out. My calling at this point life is to teach to all that would listen. But you also have a responsibility in this interaction of minds. You must come to a place where there is a change in your life. It is not enough to store the words in your mind and to be able to spew out memorized words when called upon.

Introduction

Illustration

My morning routine is to drag myself out of bed with singular determination to start my day. I sit at my desk making an effort to keep my eyes open while starting my computer to produce a thought for the day for my email list and Facebook. I am assured that of the those who receive my daily emails, at least five actually read them and Facebook I haven't a clue. One of the rituals is the presentation of a single cup of coffee. It is made by Bonnie and is placed upon my desk. As I write I gently sip this black water of awakening. Each sip with the expectation of renewed consciousness. I need that little jolt to start my heart and mind to the task ahead.

A week or so ago while celebrating my new day the morning pick me up didn't seem to as making a difference. I wasn't any more awake as I was twenty minutes before. My

fingers were not moving at the usual same speed across the keyboard. My eyes were just as heavy, I was just writing in a haze.

Don't get me wrong. One cup is usually enough to kick-start my morning, but this wakeful experience was not the same. So my hazy mind told me I needed a second cup. Something I have never done in all the years I have been married.

"Bonnie, is there something different about the coffee?"

And she said, "Oh hon, I forgot to tell you. All I had today is decaf."

Let me tell you "The best part of waking up is decaf in your cup" is simply not true.

Decaf can be deceptive. It looks like real coffee. It smells like real coffee. It even tastes like real coffee. But it doesn't deliver the goods real coffee delivers. It doesn't awaken the senses, refresh the soul, or sharpen the mind. You get the warmth and the smell and the taste of coffee—but they're all just empty promises.

One cup of coffee may not be much by some peoples standards. There are those who drink decaf for health reasons. For others, like my wife decaf is the standard after two in the afternoon because it keeps her from sleeping well at night.

But you know, deep down, if everything was right with the world—you'd rather be drinking real coffee in the morning. May I submit for your judgement, there will be no decaf in heaven. We will enjoy real coffee to the glory of God forever, and never get the jitters.

Why am I talking about decaffeinated coffee?

Well, you see—just like coffee without caffeine is dead, James tells us in our passage today that faith without works is dead.

James is diagnosing this problem of decaffeinated faith.

The empty promises of decaffeinated faith

Here's what I mean by decaf faith.

Faith that is decaffeinated

The one thing that James could not stand for was profession without practice. Words without deeds.

The Apostle Paul preached about this type of faith: 2 Tim. 3:5, he warned about Christians having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. It looks like the real thing, but there's no get-up-and-go in it.

It looks like faith. A person with decaf faith might attend church regularly. They may even be very active church members, or contribute a lot of money. Their life might even be wholesome—or at least, it looks like it is.

Decaf faith smells like faith. They might be able to recite the books of the Bible, or rattle off Bible verses from memory. And it might even feel like real faith. You can still get the warm fuzzies if you have decaf faith. I mean, even decaffeinated coffee is still hot. Just so, even decaf faith can feel like faith to the person who has it.

But here's what decaf faith is lacking. It doesn't produce any distinctively Christian, or Christ-like, behavior in the one who has it. Here's what I mean. A person with decaf faith is probably a decent neighbor, and they may even serve their community through volunteer work. But of course, we all know unbelievers who are good and dependable neighbors.

Or a person with decaf faith might cultivate several close friendships. They might be very social. But there's nothing inherently redeeming about relationships, is there? What I mean is, you don't have to be a Christian to be a good friend, do you?

And James warns us that while decaf faith might look real and even feel real—it cannot save you. Decaf faith is not saving faith. So we're going to take a closer look at what James 2:14-17 has to teach us about the difference between saving faith and decaf faith.

In the times of James alms giving was very high on the priority list for Jews. Every male Jew in the land would carry a few coins in a little purse carried on their belt. It was the dedicated amount that could be given out on any given outing for the poor. If a man carried such a purse it was signifying to all around him that he was generous to the poor. Even if he never actually gave the allocated money away it was there for all to see. The act of giving to the poor was seen as a hedge against judgment. In the writings of the day a Jew wrote, "Water will quench a flaming fire, and alms makes an atonement for sin." And again, "Everyone who occupies himself in alms shall be the face of God, as it is written, I will behold thy face by almsgiving." It was an outward sign for all to see the piety of a good Jew.

Beyond the practice of fake piety in the Jewish culture. Greek influence was infecting the Jewish Church of the dispersed. Greek culture was influencing all in the Roman Empire. It was seen as culturally acceptable to live life as a Greek. One of the influences of the Greek culture had a direct impact upon the practice of giving a helping hand in times of need. Of these Greek influences was the Stoics. The Stoics would stress the total lack of emotion or *apatheia*, the complete absence of feeling. Serenity was the goal of the Stoic lifestyle. Emotion was as seen as a disturbance in a serene life. The best defense for the Stoic was to annihilate all emotion. Pity was simply seen as a bump in the road of the philosophic life with no emotion. The Greek philosopher Virgil described the perfected Stoic man as having no pity for the poor and no grief for the sorrowing, for such emotions would only upset his point of view. For the Stoic blessedness meant being wrapped upon in a philosophic detachment and calm.

There are only two kinds of Faith, Alive and Dead

Questions of James

Looking carefully at the letter of James we have discovered places where there are gates where he tries to re-direct your attention. When we come to these places of change from one path to another we must stop, think and decide if we also need to make a change of our lives. So far in our study these gates have had a sign hung on them. The sign of a change in subject, path, or understanding is marked by the words "Brethren". In the five chapters we find this sign post plastered large and in bold letters fourteen times. But there is another a little more subtle we must be aware of.

The second "stop" sign is when James wants you to consider and come to a personal conclusion and he does that by asking a question. There are twenty questions of in James. Further, James uses this punctuation convention starting in the second chapter. I

am fully aware of lack of punctuation in the original Greek text, but there are strong inferences of query in each of the translators to add a question mark.

The Twenty questions of James:

1. 2:4a – Have you not made distinctions?
2. 2:4b – Have you become judges with evil motives?
3. 2:5 – Did not God choose the poor to be rich in faith?
4. 2:6a – Is it not the rich who oppress you?
5. 2:6b – Is it not the rich who take you to court?
6. 2:7 – Is it not the rich to blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?
7. **2:14a – What profit is it?**
8. **2:14b – Is saying something good enough?**
9. **2:14c – Can faith alone save him?**
10. 2:16 – Are good thoughts enough to comfort the needy?
11. 2:20 – Can't you understand that faith without works is useless?
12. 2:21 – Wasn't Abraham justified by his works when he offered up Isaac?
13. 2:25 – Wasn't Rahab justified by works for saving the messengers?
14. 3:12a – Can a fig tree produce olives?
15. 3:12b – Can a vine produce figs?
16. 3:13 – Who is wise and understanding?
17. 4:1 – What is the source of your quarrels and conflicts among you?
18. 4:4 – Do you not know your friendship with the world is hostility to God?
19. 4:5 – Do you think the scriptures have no purpose?
20. 5:13 – Is anyone suffering among you?
21. 5:14 – Is anyone among you sick?

Tonight we find three of the toughest questions to answer:

1. What does faith profit us?
2. Is belief and profession enough?
3. Can faith alone save us?

Definition of "ophelos" USE

The first phrase of 1:14 has been variously translated as: What profits a man, or What use is to you brethren, or What good is it. The word "use" has more nuance than one would expect. It is included again in verse 2:16. It could mean, advantage, usefulness, benefit, good, profit, gain, reward, or return. It is a word that is directly related to the person who is doing something.

This question of use, advantage, benefit, good, profit, gain, reward or return on investment is tightly attached two other questions:

1. Is there a benefit for me to proclaim that I have faith?
2. Is there profit for me to say I have faith but there is no change in my actions?

If someone shows up at church and takes a prominent seat in the congregation, holds his head at a proper slant, stands when he is directed to by the worship leader, sings

on key, shakes the preachers hand as he goes out, and tells all that would listen he was a man of faith, but when at home he neglects his family for football, constantly criticizes his wife, never opens the Bible, never goes to Bible study, swears like a sailor at work, neglects the poor man on the street corner and there seems to be no change in life, IS HIS PROFESSION WORTH ANYTHING?

If there is no change in life, there is no change in eternal life. Does this life lived without change make a difference in heaven? Notice here these words of James are a hypothetical, an example of a possibility to make a point. If someone **SAYS**, speaks, affirms, teaches, exhorts, advises, commands, directs, calling out by name. It is a conscious, willful set of words. It is an act made, an deed done, and a word accomplished. This question is one of the most profound in this letter. It is profound because it is attached to the faith of the person making the statement. A statement of faith, a profession of personal dependence, is directly related to a resulting change of life. The inference here is that there is no profit, gain, benefit to profession if there is no external shift of attitude and actions. Without a visible transformation of habits, it is all sound blown away by the next breath.

We have to understand two profound and life changing ideas. 1) Is it possible to have faith without works. 2) What are works?

Is it possible to have faith and not do works?

Is it possible to say one thing and do other things? Is it possible to say I have faith and not do the expressed will of God. Is it possible to be a sinning Christian? Is it possible to go to church and tell everyone you are saved and sin in thought, word and deed every day continually?

I would draw your attention to an account in the life of Jesus that is found in the Gospel of John in the eighth chapter. I know the Christian Jews of James' time did not have it to read. But I use this as an example to understand the question before us.

John 8:30–32 As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “if you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine: And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 8:48–51 The Jews answered and said to Him, “do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor My Father, and you dishonor me. But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Truly I say to you, if anyone keeps my word he shall never see death.”

John 8:56 – 59 “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see MY day, and he saw it and was glad.” The Jews therefore said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.”

The Jews in this account had made a profession of faith in verse 30-32 but nevertheless they tried to kill Him in Verse 59. To answer the question, “Is it possible to have faith and not do works”, this example from the life of Jesus shows us it is not only possible but to believe and in the next moment try to kill.

Can those who believe be both disciples and assassins? Does this title of disciple allow us such privilege we can pick up stones?

What are works?

James 2:15,16 James gives an example of what are works. **If a brother or sister is without clothes and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet does not give them what is necessary for their body, WHAT USE IS IT.”** What does it profit them? What advantage does it give this person in need. The first question in verse 14 is about the person seeing the need and in verse 15-16 is the person who is in need.

To say something, means little without action

It is important to notice that the specific example James is speaking of has attached to it a locality. It is within the church. James uses the same emphasis words of **Brother or Sister**. Jesus said the poor will always be with us. Nevertheless, we have a particular responsibility for those who are in our congregation.

And further it includes more than words. It must be assumed words were for the person who saw the need having little or no value to the person in the church who needs help. Action is needed, not just words and the differences are what James is pointing out as affecting this person’s faith.

Therefore, what is a work, deed, or act that makes the difference? It must be more than an acknowledgement of need. We can see the need, we can hear the need, we can speak of the need, and sometimes we can smell the need, but without a purposeful decision to act and then to follow through with that decision it means little. It must be more than a decision to do something.

Perception without intercession is worthless.

The difference is made at the point of contact. It is doing something. The advantage, the profit, the use, the good is for the other not for me. The deed may not permanently solve the problem. In our culture today we seem to want to find a long-term solution to the poor without helping at all. *It is easier to become a politician to argue the problem than to reach out and help.* Words do not help the needy. Words not connected with acts, deeds, and works do not give good, profit, advantage, use, to either the seer or the needy.

James does not stop there, in verse 17 he makes the conclusion: **Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.** The example demonstrates the conclusion. Faith alone is not enough. Even though the heart may proclaim faith and belief, if it is not

permanently attached to deeds, an external evidence of acts, a constant willful decision to work of meeting others needs, it not only is worthless it is simply DEAD.

Neutrality is not an option.

James is a very practical book. “Oh, well, do this, do this, do this, do this,” type book. But it's really not. It's a book about when the gospel takes root in your heart. What kind of life overflows as a result?

It is not about taking a moral decision made by an act of the will in that is more than specific commands, ceremonies, actions and by James writing them down in this letter they become an ethical response to commands. James is not changing a morality and changing them into works of ethics. From a nebulous concern for the poor to a mandate to do something. He seems to be shouting at us, “do this” or “do that”. But he is not. He is telling us that faith is a mandate for salvation just like Paul would say four years latter in Romans, but there is something that should happen in that moment of salvation/justification. When we have faith we have renewed our spirit to listen to the Spirit of God and we are changed. What James is saying that if you are a changed being this will necessarily change our lives.

What James is pointing out was faith must be lived out.

Faith is never an ethical thing.

Three of the temptations or trials that come to all those who believe

1. The first universal temptation to man is to be carried away by our own wants, needs lusts our what is in it for me: Selfishness James 1:13-15.
2. The second universal temptation is having personal preferences for people: the way we act around people that are different, James 2:1-13.
3. Now here is the third universal temptation: The lack of compassion beyond words. James 2:14-17.

What does it profit, a believer, who says they have faith and does not display works? The man says he has faith, but it is only what he says. His faith is only a faith of speech, no behavior and life. His faith is only a faith of profession, not of possession.

Can faith alone save him? This is saying, can this type of faith save him. James does not contradict Paul. Both affirm that true saving faith results in a changed life as evidenced by works, Ephesians 2:8-10: **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** There are those who quote Romans 2:8,9 and stop there. There is the next verse that is often left off. In the creative work of God he creates a work in us to do works.

The works of a believer speak to the world of the faith he has. God will not recognize this type of faith because it would seem that the believer does not truly believe the truth he claims to believe.

This logic fails in all the three temptations mentioned here: 1) he looks at salvation only in what the believer wants, needs, for something for his life. 2) He speaks to others who will listen, to those who would do him the most honor, those in the church, shouting from the roof tops how good he is. But when it comes to the world not a whisper, 3) He sees his calling to pronouncements of “Go in peace” and “be well” instead of reaching out a hand in action to invite them to dinner.

A believer who says they have something will do something. He acts out what he believes because it is in his heart to do so. So, to both the questions of what does it profit to the man who speaks and to the man who is need the answer is a definite NONE.

If we are all faith and no deed both are worthless. If we are only talking about what we should do and not reaching out to help the destitute of the church and by extension to all those in need as Jesus exemplified, our faith is dead; utterly meaningless, and does not profit ourselves or others.

This entire section that we're getting into, verses 14 through 26, James is speaking very clearly and explicitly into the connection between having faith in Jesus and the kind of life that that faith produces. There is a connection between faith and works. And so, it's real important for us to say on the front... and James is not saying that, “Oh, if you have these kinds of works, then you'll have faith.” That would be to get the cart before the horse. James is saying here, “You claim to have faith, therefore, let's talk about how faith looks very practically as it takes root in your heart, and therefore overflows into your life.” And he keeps coming back to this idea that faith without works is dead. And his point is that, if we say we have faith in Jesus, the one who deals graciously with sinners, the one who lays down his life for sinners, the one who came as a servant to leverage himself for others, if we say we have faith in union with this Jesus, and our lives don't begin to take on a similar attitude, a similar demeanor, a similar life of service, than James says, “You've misunderstood what faith really is. And you need to examine, do you really have the faith that you claim to have?”