

Men to Men Ministry
Lesson Eleven in the Letter of James
Belief and Deeds Part 4
Demonstration of Faith

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James 2:20-26 NASB

20 But are you willing to acknowledge, you foolish person, that faith without works is useless?

21 Was our father Abraham not justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

22 You see that faith was working with his works, and [a]as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “And Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called a friend of God.

24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was Rahab the prostitute not justified by works also when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Questions

As part of this preparation methodology for these lessons, I look for changes in style of writing. Starting in Chapter 2 James begins to use a literary change in use. He starts to ask questions. Instead of statements and arguments, James asks rhetorical questions. Rhetorical because there is always an assumption of a logical and rapid answer. There are twenty-one questions that James makes starting in chapter 2.

The second major change is the use of hypothetical suppositions. Each one begins with the word “IF”. And often they are paired with a question. Therefore James has moved from ethical demands in Chapter One and the beginning of Chapter Two and began using a Greek method of teaching. That is continually asking questions to guide the student to better and better conclusions.

An example of this teaching method is found in 2:3-4:

2 For *if* a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and is dressed in bright clothes, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in, 3 and you pay special attention

to the one who is wearing the bright clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

Psychology

Why does James use questions? Years ago I attended the University of Reno. My major was pointed toward Psychology. I took courses in Child Psychology, Principles of Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, and Social Psychology.

Psychology can be defined as the study of mental processes and behavior.

My goal in this course of studies was to understand why people do the things they do. For instance, why do I remember the rhyme from my earliest childhood?

- 1, 2, Buckle my shoe
- 3, 4, Shut the door
- 5, 6 Pickup sticks
- 7, 8 Lay them straight
- 9, 10 Let’s do it again.

I discovered that the human brain may well be categorized into two major types: the **Segmented** brain and the **Random** brain. The **segmented** brain group inputs all environmental stimuli and the resulting response into well-defined categories. They usually pay attention to one subject or idea at a time. They are predictable, stable, and driven. You may well characterize these segmented brain people to have a large post office box array to which everything was to be placed. Everything had its place in one of the boxes and not one could touch another one.

The second type of brain, the **random** brain, does not focus on the idea, or stimulus at hand to analyze it, but attempts to associate it with infinite different ideas or experiences. They seem to have millions of connections that can lead to thousands of other connections. These **random** thinkers are more creative, nurturing, and easily distracted.

There are many shades between these two but, I also discovered that the male brain was more likely to be in the **segmented** variety. Therefore, I can logically assume James had some shade of a segmented brain. He focused on one idea at a time and once that idea was logically explained he would move on to the next idea. He would come back to the previous idea quite often, but that is the way James’ thought pattern would focus.

When James in Chapter 1 verse 19 James tells us about the thought pattern of QUICK TO LISTEN, SLOW TO SPEAK, AND SLOW TO ANGER. James was revealing his thought pattern of **segmentation**.

The art of Decision-making in the segmented brain

There is a process to understand the way James thought. It mirrors the way most men think. An example:

You are at a church fellowship. There are many unique people there. Each with their reasonings and life experiences. The segmented brain person wants to put them all in their proper boxes. The process of the segmented brain has five stages.

1. **RECEIVING:** The first action is to listen, “**Quick to Listen**”. This is the receiving part of our need to segment the group. All the sounds around you are pressing on all sides. Someone has set up some music as an ambient sound in the background. Children are running up and down and there is a giant blow-up slide where there is screaming and laughing. The parents are in little groups to keep an eye on their young ones. The older ones of the group are congregated together sharing their pains and woes. There is a sound of the staff setting up tables and chairs. There is sporadic nervous laughter among the teens.

Along with our ears, we have our eyes open for anyone who seems to be sending a non-verbal invitation to join their group.

Our third area of listening is our personal preferences. Some things draw our attention away from our comfort zone of non-conformity. We seem to be drawn to those things, events, and people that are more personally interesting. We begin to prioritize the order of groups that you would like to become a part of.

2. **INTERPRETATION:** The segmented brain must not make a quick judgment on what you are going to do next. You add all the information from our ears, our eyes, and our interests. You make snap judgments as to which input received could go in which box.
 - Doc Thompson seems especially quiet tonight, I place that in my interesting box near the top of the stack.
 - Tony laughed at one of my old jokes- friendship box.
 - Adam brought cookies – into the thank-you box.
 - Bill has a sad look on his face – Concern box.

Our box sorting is not always correct. Sometimes we simply are wrong. If someone tells me that broccoli is good for me I place the person saying it in the ignorance box.

3. **RECALL:** This is our memory system. I know for the most part what box holds what. I think I told this joke before but not to this crowd. AJ asks me a question on some random thought and my recall system goes into high gear. My answer has an entry in my box list but sometimes I just don’t remember so I turn to the junk box and pull out some random response, it may not be the right answer, but it will seem as though I know what I am talking about.

After joining a group discussion, the subject at hand reminds me of one of my boxes full of useful information. But the searching for that box I start to ignore the ongoing conversation. I spend so much time in recall mode that I miss the receiving.

4. **Evaluation:** Here is where we get into trouble. In the listening, interpretation, and recall processes, we start to evaluate, to judge the person who is speaking. I start to judge the words as being the person who is speaking. Is the speaker interesting?

What is it to me? Is the speaker trying to make some point? Does the subject matter make a difference? Do I agree or disagree with the information? Can I add to the conversation? Is this witty back-and-forth good for me?

5. **RESPONSE:** I respond according to the evaluation. It may be a nod. It may be a quiet AMEN or I feel you. But I must be aware that I might have the wrong box open and I may respond with inappropriate actions. **Slow to Anger.**

The big question for tonight James 2:20

KJV But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

NIV You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

ESV Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

NASB But are you willing to acknowledge, you foolish person, that faith without works is useless?

James is asking questions that must be answered.

- Have you come to the evaluation stage of our conversation?
- Have you determined what James was saying as having worth?
- Have you opened the box of understanding or the box of foolishness?
- What is your response?
- What do you do with the idea that your personal faith box is slowly shrinking at the expense of your works box?

James was asking in his rhetorical hypothetical way if you have come to the place in your life that you would rather be foolish than know the importance of the relationship between faith and work. Are you so foolish to think that faith, by itself, without works will ultimately die? Is that small box of faith you have opened in any situation in any trial, in any temptation good enough to save you? If you believe that you are a fool.

Without work, your faith box will become so empty, that is it worse than empty it does not exist at all. If you think your faith box will always be good enough you are simply deceived.

We need a warning label on our faith box that says: If you think you are good enough, you are not.

You are a fool if you think your faith is constant. Faith must continually grow. Faith must continually stretch itself in action. The action, the deed of survival in trials is by faith. How you get through temptations is by actionable faith. Making a faith claim without life change is futile. Action that does not back up your faith will kill that faith.

Of the greatest problems in the church today is not people living by faith but that those who are living by faith are actionless. Faith without growth. In our Bible Study we are not here to about faith, but to increase your faith through action. By being quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger, and now James is adding one more thing deed. That deed is to put your evaluation into action. You are here not so you can spew out some esoteric

scripture in any situation. It is that you might live so close to the scriptures you live them out. YOU ARE TO BE THE BEST REFLECTION OF GOD, TO BE THE READABLE SCRIPTURE OF LIFE.

To answer the “fool” question, James presents a compare and contrast situation. Are you willing to learn? Are you at a place in your life where you want to know? James was getting into the Christian Church’s face and asking them, “DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?”

The churches to which James was writing were making a poor choice as to which box they depended on.

Those of the Jews were making an evaluative decision to depend primarily on the WORKS box. They were trying to keep all the laws, regulations, and lifestyle choices of their presumed ethnicity. Their WORKS box was always open and ready to be used, but their FAITH box was being neglected. For the Gentiles the converse was true: Their FAITH box was open all the time, but the WORKS box was mostly closed. What both these groups did not realize was that FAITH and WORKS boxes were right next to each other, and when one box was neglected the other was affected.

**FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD,
AND WORKS WITHOUT FAITH IS DEAD.**

Do you want to know how foolish you are? If you live a life without evidence of your faith you are the greatest fool of all. True faith is evidential. You are saved by faith and faith alone. But the faith that saves you is never alone.

Two examples of faith lived out

The patriarch and the Prostitute

This is very strange. Normally a good Jew would not put these together. Of all the examples James could have used, he chose two opposites. He was using these two examples as illustrations of those who had faith and works. Both had a dynamic faith that was real, alive, had results, and made a difference. But they are so far apart.

- Abraham was at the beginning of the Pentateuch, and Rahab was toward the end.
- Abraham was the beginning of the Jewish people, Rahab was a Gentile.
- Abraham lived his entire life for God, Rahab’s faith was for a short period of time.
- Abraham was the father of a great nation, and Rahab was a hospitable prostitute.

Today if we were called to place these two personalities into their proper boxes they would not be even close to each other. But in closer examinations, they had one thing in common. They had belief **AND** Both proved their belief in their actions.

The patriarch

James here stated in 2:21 that Abraham was considered righteous for what he did when he offered Isaac on the altar. Is that true? James is waiting for a response. It is a

question. It was not a rhetorical question. It was a question of belief. A question that the responder could either say yes or no. They had a 50% chance of being right. But James says the answer is no. It was not by that act of sacrifice it happened before the call to the mountain.

In Genesis 15 God took Abram up on a mountain for some star gazing. God asked Abraham, "You see all the stars?"

"AAAA, Yes, I see the stars," Abraham replied.

God went on in this object lesson, "Next time you are worried about your family look up."

And Abraham agreed that he would live for God according to the promise. Abraham was then called a "friend of God". Abraham was a believer. Abraham from that moment had faith.

Twenty years later after continually looking to the stars he finally started a family in his old age. His faith was rewarded with a family. But God called him to do something with his faith. A call to take his son to the mountaintop and to sacrifice him was given.

"Only the heathens have human sacrifice," said Abraham but he obeyed.

James was expecting the religious pious Jews to respond with a NO and the new believers to respond with a YES. But it did not matter what the answer was, the illustration was that FAITH is glued to works with super glue.

The Prostitute

The next response to either a yes or no response to the being a fool question was about Rahab.

Does Jesus love prostitutes?

Does Jesus love terrorists?

Does Jesus love murderers?

Does Jesus love bald guys?

Does Jesus love homosexuals?

Does Jesus love Democrats?

YES TO ALL.

Abraham was an example of an upstanding righteous man full of faith. You could place him in a special box of love, and emulation. It would be easy for God to love a man like Abraham. But how about a sinful, woman with a terrible reputation? A woman of loose morals. She slept with all kinds of men for money. That is how she made a living. Not only was she a gentile she was a bad example to faithful gentiles. She was shoved into one of the most neglected boxes in society.

But if you follow the genealogy of King David you will discover Rahab was David's great-grandmother. Further, she is in the lineage of the most famous faithful person ever, JESUS.

But I digress. Rahab had heard the news. A great army was heading to Jericho. This army was defeating all that would stand in their path. Their leading General was a man named Joshua a man of great military and spiritual reputation. Rahab knew and believed that God was in the camp of the army. Joshua had sent two spies to Jericho to discover any

weakness to the fortification. She discovered their location within the city and confronted them.

“I know that the Lord has given you the land that the terror of you has fallen on us and that all the inhabitants of the land are faint-hearted because of you for we have heard how the Lord God Yahweh has dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan. I know of the greatness of your God who utterly destroys. As I know, I beg you to swear to me by Yahweh since I have shown you kindness that you will show kindness to my father's house.

That confession of faith was not close to what we would classify as Christian as we understand salvation today. She just believed this God was the true God she made the statement of faith and then she proved that she believed it by hiding the spies. She acted outwardly visibly to prove the invisible faith that she had inwardly.

Faith and Works are inseparable

James was saying you are not a fool because you answer YES or NO, but you are foolish if you think they are not tied together. James is saying dead Faith produces nothing. Even dynamic Faith produces nothing unless it is coupled with dynamic behavior. Dynamic Behavior if it's real it will be seen.

In verse 26 we have the conclusion. We have had the question, two illustrations with a contrast of lives and now the conclusion. As the body without the spirit is dead so faith without works is dead also.

The entire section we have worked through from verse 14 through 26 is HEARING, INTERPRETATION, RECALL, EVALUATION AND RESPONSE.

Here in verse 26 James concludes this section with making one more comparison. This comparison is between Body (SOMA) the living body that hears, feels, and ultimately reacts and the Spirit (PNEUMATOS) which understands, which intellectually evaluates) is making a comparison. The living body without the understanding of faith and works is simply without life. You can place all the flowers around the casket, you can dress it up in the best clothes. You can paint a peaceful smile on his face. You can embalm him so he would wrinkle up. No matter what you do the SOMA is dead. SOMA has started its decay.

If you live only on a statement of faith and do no work your heart has already stopped. Your faith is in a statement of faith.