

Genuine Faith, Demonic Faith, Dead Faith

“Yes, a man may 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. You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?”

– James 2: 18-20 –

Since coming to Christ I have observed a very noticeable and alarming rise in the number of professing Christians who believe there’s no necessary relationship between what they believe and what they do. They contend you can’t judge a person’s spiritual condition by what he or she does because salvation is a matter of faith alone – as if requiring works violates the principle of faith.

It was that kind of reasoning that prompted James to issue this challenge: “You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”(2:18) The Greek word translated “show” means “to exhibit, to demonstrate, or to put on display.” James’ point is simple: it’s impossible to verify true faith apart from holy living, because doctrine and deed are inseparable.

People often quote the last half of 1Samuel 16:7, “For man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” to justify their lifestyle and behavior and to rebuke any judgment by others regarding any accusations of unfruitfulness or lack of spiritual character. However, there is a double truth and certainty in this verse. True, God does look at the heart and knows it perfectly, but at the same time, we as God’s people see the “outward appearance”, or the behavior and conduct – because that’s all we CAN see! Jesus mentions twice in Matthew 7, “You shall know them by their fruits”. Know what? By their conduct, by

what they say, we can assess to a reasonable degree whether their “faith is genuine” (2Cor. 13:5). “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mat.12:34). There is no more consistent demonstration of who we are than what comes out of our mouth. Where there are no visible sanctifying effects from a person’s professed regeneration, we have cause to question its reality.

I was so relieved back in 1988 when John MacArthur wrote the book “The Gospel According to Jesus”, which had a subtitle “What did Jesus mean when He said ‘Follow Me’?” The book turned the evangelical world on its ear and drew a much needed line in the sand regarding God’s terms of salvation, discipleship, and the essentials of the Gospel. It made an appeal to the church that Jesus wasn’t calling anyone to a life of ease and earthly prosperity. It contended that “Jesus is Lord” was the core of the early church’s confession and that radical change was the non-negotiable product of those whose hearts and lives answered Christ’s call to discipleship. The book was a herald and retort to a trend of longstanding Biblical compromise regarding the importance understanding that genuine faith produces a heart that voluntarily responds to Christ’s Lordship. As the church has become increasingly worldly, the Biblical truth of our duty to Christ as our absolute Lord and Master has all but disappeared from the evangelical consciousness. This heresy continues to find pathways to legitimize Jesus’ message to make it sound more appealing to people who admire Him but are not prepared to obey Him.

But back to James – can you know if someone is a Christian by watching his/her behavior? According to James, that’s the only way to know! In verse 19 he says, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” In other words, affirming orthodox doctrine isn’t necessarily proof of saving faith. Demons believe in the oneness of God, and its implications fill them with fear, but they aren’t saved. The phrase “you do well” is intentionally sarcastic. The implication

is that demonic faith is better than non-responsive faith because at least the demons shudder, which is better than no response at all.

You can't be a Christian in creed only – you must be one in conduct as well! James makes that very clear. Don't be confused or deceived by those who teach otherwise. Continually aim your life at bringing glory to God through the obedient application of Biblical truth.

- Further study: Read John 8:12-47. Make a list of doctrines and deeds that characterize dead faith and a corresponding list of those that characterize true faith.

– Article submitted by Chuck Wetzel, 06.12.20