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THE FAITH THAT WORKS.

– MAY 30. – JAMES 2:14-23. –

"I will show thee my faith by my works." – James 2:18.

MANY have supposed a conflict of opinion as between the Apostle Paul's teachings and the teachings of James respecting faith and works. We hold, however, that, rightly understood, their teachings are in fullest accord. The Jewish Law Covenant was emphatically a covenant of works, while the basis [R2159 : page 155] of acceptance under the New Covenant is faith. The law said, Do and live; the gospel says, Believe and live.

The Apostle Paul, writing to those who knew the law and who had been trained under it to expect everlasting life as a reward of faithful performance of the requirements of that law, was obliged to show that absolute obedience to that law is an impossibility as respects the fallen race of Adam; and hence that "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his [God's] sight." If, then, justification and eternal life could not be obtained by any through the works of the law, how could they be obtained? The Apostle proceeds to show that our Lord Jesus had kept the entire law blamelessly, that he thus had secured all the rewards promised to "him that doeth these things;" namely, everlasting life and all the divine blessings. The Apostle further shows that, while none can hope for eternal life through keeping the law, they may hope for it and obtain it in another way – not by doing works that would be approved under the Law Covenant, but by having a faith which would approve them under the New Covenant, and secure to them such measure of the covering of Christ's righteousness as might be necessary to compensate for all the deficiencies and imperfections of their natures which hindered them from performing the full demands of the law. Thus he tells us, "The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit."

The Apostle Paul did not for a moment mean to say that a mere intellectual assent was sufficient. His teachings are in fullest accord with James' statement in this lesson, that a faith that produced no efforts or works toward righteousness would be a dead faith, a valueless faith – or worse, a condemning faith.

Nor should James here be understood to ignore faith, and to teach that works of the law would be able or sufficient to justify sinners or make them heirs of eternal life. It is probable that some in the early Church, having come to realize that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, and that we are "justified by faith in his blood," went to the opposite extreme, as some do to-day, claiming that the conduct of life is immaterial, if only the faith be maintained. It is probable that James had this class of persons in mind when writing this epistle. He therefore guards the reader on this point – not to think that a mere *belief* or *faith*, that makes no impression upon the life, and is unaccompanied by any efforts so to live as would be pleasing in God's sight, would be a faith of any vitality, or that would do any real good. On the contrary, that is the kind of belief that devils have.

As an illustration, he points out that, as a blessing unaccompanied by food would not satisfy a hungry person, so faith unaccompanied by works would accomplish nothing. If the challenge were put, "Show me thy faith without thy works," it would be very difficult to answer it. How could faith be shown, except by works? On the other hand, it would be taking a very proper position to say, "I will show thee my faith by my works."

Abraham is called the father of the faithful; and of him it is written, "Abraham *believed* God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." But, as the Apostle points out, Abraham's faith was not of the kind that brought forth no fruitage of good works and obedience. On the contrary, God tested Abraham's faith, and his faith was proved an acceptable one by works of obedience; faith and works

cooperated in his case, and must do so in every case, else the faith will not be acceptable.

The points to be kept clearly in mind in this lesson are (1) that no works which fallen men could do would be perfect works; consequently, none of them could be acceptable to God. (2) The Christian is acceptable to God through the exercise of faith under the terms of the New Covenant. It is this faith that counts in his acceptance, because he is unable to perform works that would be acceptable. (3) His acceptable faith must be proved by his efforts to do, so far as he may be able, the divine will. (4) Since works alone would not justify, and since faith must precede good works before they will be acceptable, and since the good works, when accepted, are not accepted on account of their own perfection, but on account of the faith which makes them acceptable, therefore it follows that it is the faith that justifies us where works could not justify us, and that the works do not set aside faith, but merely attest the genuineness of the faith.

There is a grand lesson here for all who desire to please God. It is our faith that is pleasing to him – we at first having nothing else; but if the faith remains alone, without effort to produce fruits of righteousness in the life, it becomes a dead, a putrid thing, offensive to both God and man. He whose life is one of self-gratification and sin dishonors and injures any faith which he professes. Further, it is our experience that whoever fails to live in harmony with his faith will not be permitted to maintain it very long. It is to such as have some faith without corresponding efforts toward good works that the Lord sends "strong delusions that they may believe a lie." – 2 Thess. 2:11.

Let us remember that the Lord's people are "living epistles known and read of all men;" that it is the works that are read rather than the faith, and hence the importance of the Golden Text, which should more and more be the sentiment of every follower of Christ, – "***I will show thee my faith by my works.***"
