

Faith Working

a gospel sermon by Jeff S. Smith

Introduction

Faith and works are often portrayed as being at odds, but the Bible presents them as two sides of the same coin. While one could never be saved by perfectly doing all the works of the Law of Moses, neither could he practically hope to keep even the New Testament of Jesus Christ without fault. Salvation is by grace through faith, and neither negates the necessity of taking certain steps of obedience in the direction of God. Moreover, a life of faith will of necessity be one that submits to the will and wisdom of our Creator. Faith, to survive, must work.

Discussion

I. Faith Working

A. Believe

1. anyone who is concerned about his soul will want to do God's will in his own life, but sometimes the motivation for obedience is less about faith than it is about getting rewards or avoiding penalties (John 6:25-29)

2. true belief is an example of an active faith, for it requires thought, consideration and concentration; belief is not idle at all, nor is it merely a passive experience – “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6)

B. Repent

1. believing in God and his son, Jesus the Christ, means believing in more than just their existence; it also entails trusting in their message

2. the gospel message is one of change and nothing requires more effort than personal reformation

3. the New Testament presents change as a matter of repentance – a change of heart accompanied by a change in one's behavior (Second Corinthians 7:8-11)

4. it takes work to change habits, break addictions and overhaul one's mindset, but the result is worth it

C. Confess

1. sometimes faith gets derailed elsewhere – at the point where it goes beyond the confines of one's mind and must become evident to others who might be critical of the change

2. some people will stumble when it comes to confessing their faith in Jesus and an admission of belief is the work that goes undone (John 12:37-43)

3. this confession is not optional, because refusing to participate shows a lack of real faith – courage and commitment without which no one can be saved (Romans 10:8-11)

D. Submit

1. the most visible example of a submissive faith is when someone follows the pattern of the New Testament and asks to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of his sins (Romans 6:1-6)

2. the truth is that the gospel is not just news, it is something to be obeyed and there are some who stumble at what should be a glorious point (Luke 6:46-49, 7:29-30)

3. baptism is no more important than any other aspect of the gospel invitation, but it is no less important either; it is the one act described as putting the believer into the body of the savior (see Galatians 3:27)

4. baptism is not the enemy of faith; baptism is the answer of faith (Colossians 2:8-12)

E. Persevere

1. the life of the believer is regulated by the knowledge that salvation in heaven is his inheritance, but that apostasy is the forfeiture of his claims upon treasure and a mansion beyond the clouds

2. we learn to walk by faith in newness of life, to seek mercy and guidance when we stumble, and to come home if we should stray (Colossians 1:21-23)

3. we learn to be faithful even unto death (see Revelation 2:10)

II. Faith Working Through Love

A. Practical Faith

1. the only kind of faith that works is the faith that, well, works (Galatians 5:2-6)
 - a. those readers were being misled by Judaizing teachers into adopting the graceless system in the Law of Moses by which one could only hope to be saved by being perfect
 - b. ritual circumcision was the first part of that process and Paul warned them that keeping the Law of Moses was not the point, faith was – faith that worked through love
2. for your faith to be functional, it will have to be of the sort that is active and obedient and fruitful (James 2:14-26)
3. fruitful faith is the kind that brings praise to God, reformation to oneself and blessing to others (Matthew 25:14-15, 24-30)

B. Work of Faith and Labor of Love

1. faith and obedience are never divorced in the New Testament, even in the inspired recollections of the approval of Abraham, who believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness – the point is that Abraham lived before the Law of Moses and yet found approval through grace, just as we who live after the demise of the law can find it by grace through the blood of Jesus
2. Christians are encouraged to be obediently faithful to the will of God (First Thessalonians 1:2-7)
3. work of faith, labor of love – that is the kind of faith that honors God, reforms oneself and brings blessing to others

C. Faith That Sacrifices

1. faith working through love is what matters – to secure personal redemption and share grace with someone else
2. even if sacrifices must be made (First John 3:16-18)

Conclusion

Faith working. Faith working through love. That is the only kind of faith that is worth anything.