

Lesson for August 31, 2008

Old Testament Survey

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-15)

After Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, they began to have children. Cain was the first-born son and Abel was the second-born son. Apparently Cain and Abel had been taught by their father Adam with regard to the proper sacrifice to bring to God. (I John 3:12)

The proper sacrifice to bring to God would have been one that symbolized the sacrificial death of the coming Redeemer. This sacrifice would have been the sacrifice of an animal (most likely a lamb).

When the time came for Cain and Abel to bring their offering to the Lord as a sign of their faith in Christ, Cain brought an offering from something he had grown and Abel brought an animal offering. Cain's offering signified the work of his hand, labor and toil, which was unacceptable to the Lord. Cain's offering symbolized a by-works salvation. Abel's offering of the first fruit of his flock symbolized a by-faith salvation and was acceptable to the Lord. (Hebrews 11:4)

Cain's jealousy caused him to murder Abel and bring a curse from God on his life. Abel was a believer and Cain was an unbeliever according to Hebrews 11:4 and I John 3:12. Cain is a type of the religious person of today who believes he can gain the approval of God by human merit. Abel, on the other hand, is a type of the person who understands and accepts God's grace (unmerited favor). (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5)

The amazing thing about this story is that Cain continued to live many years after the murder of his brother. He was even the father of a great believer named Enoch. God, in His grace, even protected Cain from being murdered by others. There is never an indication in the Scriptures that Cain believed in the coming Messiah for salvation. Where Cain is mentioned in the Bible, it is always in a negative way, even being called a follower of Satan. (I John 3:12; Jude 11)

The two mental attitude sins that caused Cain to murder Abel were arrogance and jealousy. Cain exhibited arrogance by ignoring God's instructions regarding an animal sacrifice. Cain then exhibited jealousy by getting upset when Abel's sacrifice was accepted and his was rejected. The result was the overt sin of murder.

Faith Without Works

James 2:14-26

Many have used this passage in James to teach works for salvation. We will see from our study that this is not what James is teaching. In order to understand what James is teaching, we must consider the context. Verse one begins, "My brethren," which indicates that James is writing to believers. Therefore, he is not giving them the requirements for salvation, since they are already saved. What he is doing is giving them the requirements for fulfilling their Christian lives.

Chapter 2:14-26 gives us both the doctrine of divine production and a Biblical illustration from the Old Testament. It's interesting that the Holy Spirit inspired James to use Abraham as the illustration, especially when it is compared to Romans 4:1-25.

Let's take a brief look at both passages to get it clear in our minds that salvation is NOT the subject of James 2. Compare:

James 2:21 with Romans 4:2

James 2:22 with Romans 4:4

James 2:23 with Romans 4:3

James 2:24 with Romans 4:5

How do we show the world our faith? This is the question that is answered in James 2. The answer, of course, is by divine production. Divine production, as we have studied, begins with Divine Viewpoint Thinking, which leads to right motivation and right action. The world cannot see your thinking. It can, however, see the *results* of your thinking. Therefore, if we are to be testimonies for Jesus Christ, people must see the character of Jesus Christ in our attitudes and our actions.

This is exactly how James begins this section in verse 14. "What advantage does it bring a believer in Jesus Christ, though a person say that he has faith, without accompanying deeds? Can faith deliver him?" Deliver him from *what*, is the question? In context, the deliverance is from being a respecter of persons, from being judgmental and from showing no mercy. Therefore, what we have is application of our faith. "Faith" can be the body of doctrine that we believe to be true or it can be the act of believing. In either case, we are talking about applying what you learn. True deliverance from sin (mental or overt) is found by applying accurate Bible doctrine.

The next verse we must consider is verse 17, which says, “even so faith if it hath not works is dead, being alone.”

Remember there are several types of death in the Bible. This death is a reference to the temporal death of the believer (to whom it is addressed). Dead can actually mean useless or vain. This is the meaning in this context. The believer who fails to apply what he has learned is temporarily dead or not producing divine good. He is useless!

What James is obviously trying to teach us is that learning and believing the Word of God is not enough. There must also be application of the doctrine we learn. The believer must be filled with the Holy Spirit when applying doctrine for it to bring forth divine good (gold, silver, precious stones). James is saying that divine good works should be the natural result of our faith in Christ. An excellent cross-reference is Ephesians 2:8-10. We are saved by grace through faith apart from human works, but we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. Good works can be overt or invisible. Thinking divine viewpoint is a good work but can't be seen. James just happens to use overt good works to illustrate his point.

We have studied on several occasions the Royal Ambassadorship of the believer. You should be aware, therefore, that you represent Jesus Christ here on earth. It is rather amazing, when you think about it, that you and I have been left with the task of presenting Jesus Christ to the world. Why didn't God choose angels, use donkeys or burning bushes like in the Old Testament? I believe the explanation is that when an unbeliever sees the change in the attitude, the character, the thinking and the actions of an advancing believer, it is a better testimony for Christ than a burning bush, a talking donkey or even an angel.

We need to begin to realize that when we as Christians stand up and tell the world that we have a faith that will set them free, lift them up, transform their thoughts and actions, give them hope, joy and peace, it's fair for them to ask, “Has it? Does it? Can it?” If they fail to see these things in our lives, are they likely to believe us?

We have a wonderful opportunity to add to the beauty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by the life that we lead. This is what James is saying throughout his entire book. You have the potential to have a great impact on those around you for the cause of Christ. You can be the best or the worst illustration of the truth of God's Word by your words and deeds. None of us are neutral when it comes to our effect upon men's estimate of the faith we profess.

Now let's take a look at the two illustrations that James uses to demonstrate the importance of showing our faith by means of our works.

First, we have Abraham in verses 21-24. The story of Abraham and Isaac, of course, is the most dramatic illustration in the life of Abraham. In this story Abraham illustrates his faith in God by obeying God's command to sacrifice his only son. I'm sure you can see the analogy to our Savior in this story. As Abraham is about to sacrifice his only son, God provides a substitute, a ram caught in a thicket. The word "perfect" in verse 22 means full measure or mature. Abraham's faith was brought to maturity by obeying God (divine production).

The "fulfillment of scripture" mentioned in verse 23 means that first Abraham believed God (regarding salvation through faith in Christ) and that God imputed His righteousness to him. Then by means of good works Abraham was called the friend of God (a demonstration of his faith).

Verse 24 refers to being justified before people, not God. We know how we are justified before God and that is through faith alone in Christ alone. So this is an obvious reference to being justified before men.

The second illustration that James uses is that of Rahab. Though not as dramatic as Abraham's story, it is nevertheless an illustration of how divine production demonstrates your inner faith. This story, you may recall, is about the spies sent to check out Jericho before God gave it into the hands of the Israelites. The king of Jericho attempted to capture the spies, but Rahab hid them and helped them escape. Therefore, Rahab and her household were spared when the city of Jericho was destroyed. Rahab was showing her faith by her outward deeds.

The last verse we want to consider is 26. This verse uses the analogy of the body without the spirit to illustrate "faith without works is dead." The human spirit is given only to believers and is the means by which we learn and apply doctrine. The Holy Spirit teaches the human spirit and without the human spirit man is unable to understand and apply spiritual things. The body can learn Bible doctrine academically, but cannot understand it and apply it apart from the human spirit. In the same manner, faith cannot be applied without divine production (good works).

Our conclusion, therefore, is that a person is indeed justified by works, *but not before God*, only before other people. If you want to be a walking illustration of faith in Christ, you must apply what you learn.

