

The Action of Faith Part 2

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James 2:14-20

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will 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. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

Faith at its simplest is acting like something is real. You really believe it to be true and you behave and conduct yourself as if it is true. We all have faith. Whether you're a Christian or not, we all exercise faith. How do I know what your faith is in? By watching the way you live. Faith is acting like something is true. It is not just thinking something to be true; it is *acting* as if it is. It is a life lived by what you deem real.

Last week we demonstrated that Peter believed that he could remain true to Jesus and not deny him. Our text was from Luke 22 verses 31 through 34. Jesus tells Peter that before the night was over he would deny Him three times. Peter argues with Jesus—can you imagine? It takes great faith to argue with God, and Peter had enough faith in himself to believe that Jesus was wrong. He insisted that not only would he not deny Him, he would go to prison or even die for Jesus. Peter believed that was true. He wasn't wishing it was true, he wasn't hoping it was true, he believed it was true.

He truly thought he believed he would remain faithful. But when the challenge or pressure against Peter came and he had to put actions to his profession of faith, he couldn't do it. When he had to put his money where his mouth was he suddenly didn't have funds. He didn't have anything to back up his claim that he would be the last man standing with Jesus. He could only act or behave according to his faith in what he believed to be reality. That's all anybody can do. You can only act in a way that follows what you believe is real, whether you're a Christian or not. That's the way God made humanity. I want to make it clear once again that for every non-Christian here, you exercise faith every day.

Peter didn't rationalize and think all of this out objectively and deliberately, no, not at all. At the moment of temptation, he didn't say to himself, "Jesus told me I would deny Him but I'm not going to deny Him. But what are you going to do now, Peter?" He simply reacted based upon his

perception of reality. For Peter, reality in his soul was, “If I don’t deny Jesus, I’ll die, and right now, I love my life more than I love Jesus.” That was what was in his soul. That was reality for Peter, and that is all he could do. His faith believed that life is better as a denier of Jesus, than to be dead with Jesus.

When Jesus restored Peter in John 21, note that He did not ask Peter three times if he believed in Him. No, He asks Peter three times if he loved Him. This was the reality of that night when three times Peter was challenged as a follower of Jesus. Jesus aimed His questions at the core of Peter’s soul because that’s where our perception of reality exists. Reality for Peter was that he didn’t love Jesus more than his own life. Therefore, Peter’s example proves that you can only exercise faith according to what is real to you.

Peter really thought he loved Jesus more, but Peter’s faith was incomplete and therefore insufficient. I call this *abstract faith* because it isn’t really faith in God but faith in *faith*. It doesn’t move mountains because it isn’t real faith. Peter had faith in his faith that he wouldn’t deny Jesus. I call it abstract faith because this kind of faith is not concrete, it’s not real. It is what James called faith, but *dead faith*. Dead faith can’t move anything; it can’t cause anything to come about. It’s faith, he calls it that, but it’s dead. It’s ineffectual. It doesn’t bring about the result you want.

Last week we established the definition of faith in God:

Faith is seeing what God sees as real and acting accordingly.

Faith is the ability to see reality as God sees it, and He sees everything about reality, the visible and invisible. God, in a moment of time, through His word and by His Spirit, shows you reality and you get a glimpse of it and in that moment you act as if it’s true because it is true. That’s what faith is.

Last week we looked at abstract and active (biblical) faith; this week I want to show you that all faith, whether in God or something else, is comprised of four components.

In the next message, I want to show you how you can grow your faith, but first, you need to understand the building blocks of faith. Whether you’re an atheist or you believe in God, whether your confidence is in your education or your wealth or in yourself or in Jesus Christ or in something else, all faith has these four components. We need to understand how these components work, if we are to have faith in Christ and see God move.

I. The Components of Faith

The first component of faith is:

A. An Object.

Faith has something or someone that it looks to as an object of confidence, something or someone it trusts.

Most of us, even Christians, when we operate in what we call faith is merely a wish or a hope that something is true. We say, "I have faith," but what we really mean is "I'm hoping that comes to pass." But, as we said a few moments ago, we all exercise faith multiple times daily. We could not live in this world without faith. We don't often recognize our faith in action because for us faith is normal. Numerous times a day, you exercise faith in things and people but you don't stop and say, "Oh, that's faith!" or, "That's not faith." No, you just live and exercise faith because that's how we operate normally.

Then there are others of us who see faith more mystically. We think we're believing something that's really not true but we hope it is and maybe if we believe hard enough it will be true. That's what a lot of Christians think, but that's not faith either. All true faith, whether it's in God or something else, always has a legitimate object; something or somebody that is believed. There is always an object.

A very simple illustration is a chair. If I am to take my rest on chair, then I must exercise faith in the chair that it can hold me up. When you came in this morning, you all exercised faith and you didn't even think about it. You're all seated, nobody is standing uncertain if the pew will hold them up. Some of you have several people on the same pew and you didn't think, "I wonder if this pew can handle all of us or not." No, you exercised faith without question. You didn't analyze the structure or look for cracks or flaws to see if it would support the weight, you simply sat down.

This is what we mean by the object of faith. Faith has something or someone in whom it places confidence or trust.

B. Knowledge.

In order for me to exercise faith in the chair or the pew, I cannot just hope that it will hold me up. That's not faith, that's a wish. If I'm not sure the chair will hold me up and I take a chance that it might, that's not faith, that's gambling. That's not faith. Faith is based upon a knowledge of the object that I'm placing my trust in. I know certain things about it that causes me to believe it's capable of holding me up, if I should sit down on it. For faith to operate, I need knowledge. I need to know that the chair will hold me up when I sit down and rest my weight on it.

The knowledge of the chair is what feeds faith in the chair. I need to know something about its sturdiness and soundness. I can gain information about the chair's trustworthiness by watching others sit on the chair. This is what we call faith in the testimony of others. All of us came to faith in Christ by the testimony of others. That's the earliest form of faith in our hearts. By the testimony of the apostles and prophets who wrote the Bible and gave the Gospel. By the testimony of a witness, a friend, a family, a preacher, we heard the Gospel, and because of our confidence in the person, we believed what was said was true, that the information they gave

us was actual and factual. That knowledge led to Christ as the object and those are the first two building blocks of faith.

Another way I can gain knowledge about the chair is from personal experience sitting in the chair or in another chair. I've learned that every chair I've ever set it has held me up with the exception of one or two over the years. That's a pretty good track record, as many times as I've seated myself over the last several decades. I have gained by personal experience through sitting in other chairs that this chair will probably hold me up, in fact I'm quite sure. Somehow I need to know something about chairs and apply it to this chair.

Knowledge of the object of faith is a prerequisite to faith. That is why faith is never a leap into the dark or taking a risky chance. It is always a step into the light, the light of knowledge, the light of information, namely the Word of God given to us and inspired and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. However, if I stop with knowledge, then my faith is no better than Peter's faith, which led to his failure to remain faithful and to his denial of Jesus. His faith was abstract only. It was a faith in his faith and not in Christ. He believed in himself that he could remain strong when others couldn't. But the problem with Peter's faith was the object of his faith—himself. He proved untrustworthy of his confidence.

The problem was Peter didn't really know Peter. The object of the knowledge of his faith was incomplete. He really didn't know his own heart. That's why there are so many people who claim to be Christians but their faith will not support their eternal weight. It's faith in the wrong object. It's faith in faith. Faith in the fact that you believe, faith that you prayed the prayer, faith that Jesus forgave you of your sins so when you die you get to go to heaven. My dear friend, you can believe in your prayer or profession, and you can believe in them with all your heart, but when the hour of testing comes, faith in the wrong object will not hold you up.

The reason many treat faith as a wish or hope that God will do something for them is because they really don't know God. If you are to exercise genuine faith in God, you've got to know God. You have to know *Him* not just certain facts about Him. God must be the object of your faith. This is what biblical faith is—knowing God and that He is able to keep you as you've committed yourself to Him. Faith works because a person knows the object that he or she is putting their faith in. But so many Christians really don't know God. Their theology of God is completely inadequate and in many cases absolutely wrong. I'm not talking about nonbelievers, I'm not talking about false Christians, I'm talking about true believers.

So many of us in this room, our faith in God is so weak because our knowledge of God is weak. If faith requires an object and knowledge in that object, then I've got to make sure what I know about God is right. I need to know more about Him for my faith to grow. We'll talk about that next. But for us, faith is a huge problem. We pray and pray and seldom see what we ask for brought to pass. The problem is not your prayer life; your problem is not even your faith life. Your problem is that you don't know God and what you do know of Him probably isn't true.

Let me give you an example. I daresay if we could open up the heart and look at the reality within, at your core beliefs about God, your perceptions about what's real and true about God, I am sure we would discover that most of us in this room see God in a totally wrong way.

We see Him as a very difficult person to please. We see Him as overly critical. We see Him as not as loving or as good or as gracious as He claims to be. We know that he is not those things in our head but down deep in the core of who we are, we really do see God in that way. We see Him more strict, harsh, demanding, and difficult to please. Therefore, it is not difficult to see why our faith in prayer produces little result. How can you pray and believe you can receive anything from a God that you don't even believe you please? You can't.

The object is all wrong because the knowledge of the object is wrong. If you're finding it hard to put faith in God in a particular situation right now, I would ask you to first of all examine what you believe about God. Are your core beliefs of God biblically informed? Have you come to the point where what the Bible says about Him is your true reality of God? Next week we'll see how that happens and how you can have that happen, but today you're not ready for that. We've got to deal with this first. What do you truly believe about God?

If I come to God about my need and I feel like somehow I'm not the kind of Christian I ought to be, my prayer life is not like it ought to be, I'm not evangelizing like I should, then faith in God is going to be weak at best. If all I can see is what I'm not, that is not pleasing to the Lord, then I'm not in the position where I can trust God would listen to me. Your knowledge about your object of faith must be biblical. You've got to believe what the Bible really says about God.

Something else is required other than knowledge and an object. That something else is *confidence*.

C. Confidence in the Object.

Confidence, or *trust*, is mainly a byproduct of what you think with feeling attached to it. Confidence has a range of probability. You can feel 50 percent or 75 percent or 100 percent certain about something. If you come to God and you feel 100 percent certain that He is hearing you and will give you what you ask because you're asking according to His will, that tells me that your knowledge of God is biblical, you know this about God, and therefore you're exercising confidence toward Him.

But many of us don't feel 100 percent certain when we bring our prayer requests to the Lord, do we? We say, "Well, Lord, I hope this is Your will, I'm not for certain it is, but I know I'm supposed to pray." Certainty in God can fluctuate. Based upon the certainty of my knowledge of the object, the emotion of confidence will be felt to that degree. If my understanding of the truth I am believing is more certain, then I will feel more certain, if I'm less certain of my understanding, then I will feel less certain in the object of my faith. That's how trust and confidence works. You can feel it in your body.

The last component of faith is for my knowledge and trust of the object to generate a *commitment*, or in other words, *action*.

D. Commitment to the Object.

This is where the text is so important. Commitment—this is an act of the will. This is what action is. My action is the carrying out of my commitment to the object of my faith.

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17)

What James is calling *dead works* is what I call *abstract faith*. It is only a profession of faith, a thought that you believe when in truth you do not. This kind of faith is not concrete or real because it does not create actions. Then James illustrates.

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?”

If he doesn't have corresponding actions? Remember, what is faith? Acting like something is true. How do I know you have faith? Because you behave based upon what you believe. You all sat down in the pews today, not even thinking about it, because you were certain that the pew would hold you up, therefore you committed yourself to the pew. That's faith. What James is showing us here is a person who has an object and knowledge, and some degree of confidence but they do not have corresponding action. They don't act like it's true. Tell me, what kind of faith is that?

“Can faith save him?”

That's a rhetorical question. Of course, it can't. Here's the illustration:

“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (James 2:14-16)

If you look at this poor brother or sister and profess a statement of faith, “Be warmed, be filled, be satisfied, be clothed,” what is that profession of faith going to do if you don't follow up with actions and cloth them and feed them? That's the problem with the prosperity movement, the word of faith movement, this “name it and claim it” stuff. They believe if they say something that makes it true. Wrong. That's not what true faith in God does. True faith in God is the opposite—because I know God, I can say what's true about God and my reality, and God responds as I act in accordance with that.

Just saying words like, “Don't be hungry anymore” isn't going to help the needy person. Faith in God hears what God says about that person, which is that you ought to feed your brother. Faith responds in action saying, “I'm going to believe God and therefore I'm going to act and do what I can to help them.” This is the way faith operates.

You must have an object, and then you must have correct knowledge about the object, because if not, then it will not matter how much confidence you possess, your faith will not produce the desired effect. If the information about the object you trust is inaccurate, then your faith will be misplaced. Once the knowledge is accurate, then you must have confidence. Knowledge should lead to confidence. I can have some level of confidence because of what I know about my object of faith, and therefore, I can commit myself to that object.

Let's go back to our illustration of the chair. The chair is the object of faith; I know this chair can hold me up because I have a history with chairs. I've watched others sit in this chair, so I have a degree of confidence it will hold me up. The next thing I need to do to really exercise faith is commit and sit in the chair. This is the way true biblical faith works.

We're going to speak to believers, but first I want to say a final word to people who may not be Christians in this room this morning. You have a degree of faith in God. You believe Jesus died on a cross and rose from the dead, you may have even prayed and asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins. You're trusting what you did 20 years ago, two weeks ago, 10 years ago. You believe it is the magic bullet because you prayed that prayer, you asked Him to forgive and you believe He died and rose again, and that is the extent of your faith. But I don't care about that and neither does God. God is not interested in any of that. He doesn't put any weight or authority upon those things. The Bible never tells you to put your faith in just the facts or your faith in your prayers. We just read that even the demons believe and they do something that you don't—tremble.

What then does God put confidence in? How you live in light of what you believe, that is what God gives weight to. You can claim to be a follower of Jesus, but God says the way we truly know you are is by the way you live. Faith with corresponding actions, meaning that you adjust your life according to what God has said—that's what God's interested in. Do you believe God enough to order your life to His commandments? Those who do are real Christians. They're exercising faith in God. They sit down and put their weight on God.

They're not looking at the chair but never sitting down in it thinking, "Well, I believe the chair will hold me up. I'm pretty confident, in fact, I'm 100 percent confident." If they do not sit down putting their full weight on the chair, then they are not exercising faith in the chair. All they are doing is telling themselves what they know about the chair.

Faith is not just in the head. You've got to get rid of that definition. You've got to erase that. Faith is not in the head. It includes what's in the head but it's must go deeper, to the very core of who you are. It's from there you live. You don't live out of the brain, you live out of the heart and the heart isn't just a pumping organ, it's the will. The will. What's in your will, in the core of your life, determines behavior, character, and actions, and there is where we will know what you trust in.

God says, "If you love Me, you will obey Me." Remember Peter's problem? He thought he was committed. He believed he was committed but down deep he loved himself more than he loved Jesus. So, we can see that faith and love have a relationship. Paul explained in Galatians 5:6 what

the relationship is. He said that faith works through love. If you really love Jesus, you trust Him. Faith works through love. You can't love Jesus and not obey Him, because if you really love Him you will also trust Him.

I want to ask this simple question: What dictates why you live the way you live? What's ordering your life? Look at it. Examine it for a few moments. Why do you make the choices you make? Is it because Jesus is the object of your faith, and reality is based upon Him, or is it something else? The way you interact with the object of your faith is going to tell us what the object is and whether it's Jesus or not.

I want to end by speaking to my brothers and sisters and show you how these four components work together. All you've got to do is turn back to James chapter one.

This is why there are so many people in the world who say, "Yeah, I'm a Christian," but they don't act how a Christian should act. I'm not being judgmental, I'm not criticizing them, I'm just explaining why that is. The reason it happens is because of a misplaced faith. They have faith, but it's not in Christ, it's in themselves or something else. The same is true about Christians.

Just because you've trusted Jesus and you've come to know Him and committed your life to Him, doesn't mean that when you pray you get everything you ask for. It doesn't mean you always have faith and exercise faith in God? How many of you would say that your faith at best is weak, not strong? Why is that? I say it goes back to the object of your faith and what you really know about Jesus.

In James 1:5, James says,

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God..."

Here we have a dilemma. I have a problem and I don't know how to solve the problem. I lack wisdom. I need an answer. James introduces us to the first component of faith—the object: let him ask of God. God is the object. You have a problem, you need a solution, you need wisdom, whether it be at home or work, financial, relational, James says the object of your faith is God, so go to God and ask Him. That doesn't mean you can't ask other people for their wisdom or advice but the object of your trust and confidence is not in those people, it's in God who can use people to speak wisdom into your life.

The Bible says, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety," but your trust is not in the multitude, it's in God. So, you have a problem and you need a solution, and James points you to the object. The object is God.

Then James says,

"...who gives to all liberally and without reproach..."

James now gives you the second building block of faith, knowledge. He's telling you something about the object of your faith, which is God. He tells you that God is a very generous God who gives liberally. He's a good God and He's not just good, He's bighearted. You're coming to a God who is not stingy. You've got a Father who wants to bless His children. He's not some ogre, some difficult person who is hard to please. He's a loving dad who wants to give good things to His children, I just read that this morning. "If you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them who ask Him?"

So often we don't believe that. We believe He's stingy and we have to pry things out of His hands. The more I can make myself feel certain that I believe, the less of a grip He has. But James says He gives liberally. Friends, if you knew how liberal and generous God was, your prayers would not be small, you would be asking huge things, big things, gigantic things.

Look at the size of your request. That tells you how big God is in your heart. Is all you can ask for small? Well, then, that tells me how much you think God can do for you. You can't believe Him for big things? And that tells me what you believe about God.

James continues to give us more knowledge about our object of faith. Not only is God liberal but He won't chastise you for asking. He wants you to ask; He will not discourage you coming to Him. Our Father doesn't call you derogatory names, He doesn't reproach you. He doesn't gesture and say, "Are you always so stupid?" He won't say, "Boy, you finally got around to Me, did you?" God doesn't have His arms crossed to you and you've got to un-pry His arms. That's not a biblical view of God. His arms are always outstretched. Why a cross? Why did Jesus die on a cross? I think one of the many reasons is because His hands were pinned outstretched saying, "Come! Anybody who will trust in Me, come! My arms are open."

He says, "I'm here waiting. I can't wait to bless you." God is very patient. This is the knowledge about God that James is supplying that He longs to bless you and He's not going to criticize you for asking.

Now you have two components of faith: God should be the object of your quest for wisdom and knowledge about God, that He gives generously and is not critical of you.

Next James says in verses 5 and 6, "and it will be given to him . . . but let him ask in faith with no doubting." This is the third building block, confidence—certainty that it will happen.

The fourth building block of commitment is a little more difficult to find but it's in verse 8.

"...for he is a double-minded man, unstable in all of his ways."

That's the fourth building block. It's wrapped up in the word *double-minded*. What does the word *double minded* mean? It really means *soul*. Here's a man who is about 50 percent certain that God will give him wisdom and 50 percent unsure that He will. He knows facts about God, that He's

generous and liberal, but he's not 100 percent certain, he's only 50 percent certain. He prays anyway that God would help and give him wisdom, but while he's praying that God would give him wisdom, the other 50 percent of doubt kicks in and takes over. He leaves off his praying and works to solve the problem with his own resources.

That's what James means by a double-minded, double-souled person. I know certain things about God and I'm somewhat certain that He might answer, but there's a part of me that I'm just not sure, therefore I don't commit it to God and leave it with God, trusting that He will give the answer. I go and try to figure it out on my own.

The action of trying to resolve the dilemma in one's own wisdom demonstrates the commitment of faith. Faith is in the wisdom, ingenuity, and power of the double-minded person. They have faith in themselves. That's the person who can't receive from God because ultimately there is truly no faith in God.

Beloved, what I want you to do this morning is really examine your heart and challenge your own beliefs about who God is and what He has said about His goodness and grace. That's why there are people in this room who want to be saved this morning but aren't. If that's you, it's simply because you've not yet believed what is true about Jesus. Believe what's true about Him and He will receive you, cleanse you, take your sins, and removed them from you as far as the east is from the west. He will not despise or reject you, He will receive you unto Himself.

To the child of God, I want you to do the exact same thing. I want you to challenge what you believe about God. Can you believe God for bigger things than just getting over a cold? That's a good thing and I'm not against it, but if your faith can't rise any higher than that, then there's a reason. The reason is that in those four building blocks, there's some problems, and it probably falls on building block number two, what you know about God. If what you know about God is biblical and well-informed and it gets down into the core, your confidence will be there and you will then be able to commit. You will act according to what you think is true about the Lord. Amen.