

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: November 4, 2018

Lesson Title: "With Work"

Lesson Passage: James 2:14-26

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Our lesson passage highlights one of the more familiar teachings in the Letter of James, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only." This lesson will provide an opportunity to explore the nature of faith and clarify the relationship between faith and works.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Reconcile the statement of James, "faith without works is dead," with Paul's insistence that "a person is justified by faith without the works of the law." (2) Explain the relationship between faith and works in the teaching of James.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To introduce the lesson, ask this question: "Which is more essential to salvation, faith or works?" Pause for responses, then write on a marking board, "FAITH VS. WORKS." (*Suggestion: If you don't have a marking board, use poster board or newsprint for this activity.*) Under "FAITH" write Romans 3:28 and Ephesians 2:8-9. Under "WORKS" write James 2:14,24. Then ask: "How are we to reconcile what Paul says with what James says about the relationship between faith and works?"

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Ask everyone to turn to the lesson passage, James 2:14-26; then share these thoughts:* (1) "Faith" can mean different things to different people. One kind of faith is mere intellectual agreement. For example, individuals might "believe" the "second law of thermodynamics" without that belief having much effect on their daily lives. On the other hand, it is a quite different thing to "believe" in a surgeon enough to place your life in his or her hands. (This second kind of belief is the kind you must act on to demonstrate its genuineness.) Apply the same principle to faith in Christ. It's one thing to say you believe what the Gospel writers say about Jesus, but do nothing about it. It's quite another thing to believe in Jesus to the extent that you live for his sake every day of your life. James is rejecting the first kind of faith in 2:17-19. The person who has an intellectual belief in God but does nothing about it is no better off spiritually than the demons, who also believe in that sense (v. 19).

2. "Works" can also be misunderstood, in two different ways. In Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul is speaking of slavish obedience to the 613 requirements of the Jewish law as a means of earning merit with God. But James (in Jas. 2:20) is speaking of "works" as the outgrowth of a living, dynamic faith in Christ. (He would never accept the dichotomy implied in the question, "Are we saved by faith or works?" He would say, "You can't have one without the other." ILLUSTRATION: In the musical "Oklahoma!" the hero, Curly, sings a song about Jud, the villain of the story. In the song, "Ole Jud is Daid," Curly sings about how Jud "loved everybody, but "he never let on." A faith that is never demonstrated is just as empty as a "love for everybody" that remains a closely guarded secret.

3. Note that in verse 14, James is talking about a person who only says he has faith, without demonstrating that faith in the way he or she lives. However, James doesn't admit that such faith--faith devoid of works--is really possible.

4. Use this story to illustrate the meaning of James 2:16-17: A farmer whose barns were full of corn as a result of a bumper crop regularly included in his nightly prayers the petition, "Lord "bless all the people who are hungry." One evening, after hearing his father pray for the poor and needy, his little boy said, "Daddy, I wish I had all your corn." "Why, what would you do with it?" his father asked. "I would use it to answer your prayer," his son said.

5. Emphasize the fact that Paul, like James, taught the importance of works as the natural outgrowth of faith: (1) In Ephesians 2:10, Paul teaches that we are "created in Christ Jesus" for the purpose of good works. (2) In Romans 2:6 he speaks of God "who will render to every man according to his deeds." (3) In 1 Corinthians 3:8, he says that "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." But, in Philippians 1:6, he makes it clear that God is the moving force behind the "work" that is done in and through His people.

6. Suggest that the biblical attitude toward "works" is summed up in the words of the familiar gospel song, "To the work, to the work, [because] we are children of God..." Then add this: Ephesians 2:8-9, a biblical text that makes it clear that we don't earn salvation by "doing good," is followed immediately by verse 10, which assures us that we are saved by the grace of God for the purpose of "doing good."

CLOSING THE LESSON

To conclude the lesson, refer to the affirmation in James 1:17: God, "the Father of lights" (i.e., Creator of the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and stars) doesn't dangle temptations before His people; rather, He gives "good and perfect gifts" (v. 17).

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