

## Alive Faith.

Philippians 2:1-18

Hebrews 10:1-18

James 3

Last week we finished up the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter which was all about faith being proven by works. That true faith really is never faith alone but it will be followed by good works. That does not change the fact that it is by faith alone that we are saved, our works can not justify us before God, but rather they prove to ourselves and others around us that the faith that we do have is a true, vibrant, living faith.

There is a rather large argument going on within the NCT camps right now, and in fact it has been going on for a few years. And honestly I haven't followed it that much because frankly I think that outside of some extremists with some radical views who claim NCT, the majority of these people are saying the same thing but they are just using different terms and having a hard time defining those terms to each other. I mention this because this is something I didn't think about when studying this out last week but it became apparent to me as I thought it out some more this week.

The debate can by pretty much boiled down to the question, is there a law for believers today. Like with most things there are various view points ranging from the extreme of one side who want to carry the Mosaic Law over to the church today, and some not just the church but seek to have it become the law of the land and to reestablish a Godly nation. This view is known as Theonomy, or christian reconstructionism, and has its roots mainly in the Reformed faith and covenant theology. Then you have the other side, which is some of what we talked about last week, the idea of a no lordship salvation. That Christ is your savior, but not your Lord. Meaning that you are a law unto yourself, you are able to choose for yourself what is right and wrong, you are your own moral compass.

This latter view is the effect that liberalization has had within the christian religion, I use the term religion because this is not actually what the bible teaches but it something entirely different. This is shown by the acceptance of things within the church that the bible explicitly forbids. A person of this type of faith does not show forth fruit of the spirit, their life does not reflect Christ, in fact it doesn't really look much different then anyone elses Monday through Saturday.

So those are really the 2 extreme ends of the question, is there a law for believers today.. There is also debate as the whether the Mosaic law is applied to believers today and some who seek to bring certain parts of it over to the new testament. These are much closer to covenant theology then new covenant theology, though they often times use terminology of those who hold NCT, but often times are in disagreement over the role of the Mosaic Law. We have had to deal with this very issue as we were going through the process of finding a pastor. Most who applied claimed to agree with New Covenant Theology, but after a few phone calls, emails, or when they would candidate it would be come apparent that they did not fully understand what it meant.

But that is not the debate that is going on within the NCT camp. There is basically 2 sides now, both agree that the Mosaic Law does not have a binding effect on the New Covenant believer today just as Paul argues in Galatians, and Hebrews, and even James here uses the term that we are under the law of Liberty, and Paul says the Law of Christ. So that is what this debate has been about is what is the Law of Christ, or Law of Liberty. There has been much going back and forth, and many books have been written on this subject. At first I was following this debate quite heavily because I was trying to figure out where I fell out in these 2 NCT camps. But over time, it became apparent to me that it looked much like both are saying a lot of the same things but were actually talking past each other.

One group uses the term mystics, or mystical. Which I think if I am understanding this correctly you could apply this term to those in the no lordship camp. That we are free to do whatever we want in this life because it doesn't matter and all that matters is our faith. The idea that there is no law whatsoever, or to use the term antinomian. Anti-Law. Many of us who hold to the NCT view are called antinomian by those who hold the reformed covenant theology view, but it is not actually a true assessment, for we are not a lawless people determining for ourselves what is right and wrong, but we have the holy scripture and the holy spirit which teaches us, and helps us to live our christian life following God's commands.

So I think, from what I can gather the debate between these 2 NCT groups comes down to the use of terms. One group uses the term, Law of Christ, saying that it is a law unto the believers, that the mosaic law has been replaced by this law of Christ which are Christs commands that are found in the bible. The other group seems to be adverse to using the term law, and instead chooses to use the terms imperatives. Basically from what I can understand, one group says we must follow the commands of Christ, and the other group is saying we must follow the imperatives of Christ, but one is calling the commands a new law, and the other says we are not under law but we follow God's commands or imperatives. Now this debate is raging on between much smarter men then I, so I am probably missing something, but at least to me it seems that they are talking past each other and are lost in debates over terms and nuanced things.

The reason I brought this up, is because of what James was teaching in chapter 2. Verse 15, 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?

As we mentioned last week, he is showing that faith without works is dead, it does not good if you claim to have faith, but you do not have the outward signs, or the workings of Christ in you. You can say something all you want, you can believe something all you want, but unless it plays out in your life in a very real way, it doesn't really amount to much of anything. Claiming to have faith in God, without good works, is like the people who claim the earth is flat. The only evidence that they have is their own circumstantial evidence...they make claims like Well, when I am in a plane, I don't see the curvature of the earth, so therefor it must be flat. But there is overwhelming proof that the earth is a globe, there are outward signs and proof showing it to be a globe. Just saying that you believe something because you say you believe something does not make it true.

Also, verse 21 in chapter 2. Was not our father Abraham justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the alter? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? Jame's whole point here is that if you have faith, if you claim Christ as your savior, if you are a child of God then you will have good works.

This is not a person who has a mystical faith, A person who has a true faith in Christ, he will, by the power of the holy spirit given to him by God, that person will keep God's commandments, not as the Jews did with the Mosaic Law to gain merit, in an attempt to gain justification. But they will instead keep God's commandments because they have been given a heart to love God, they seek to do his will. A person of true saving faith does not need a codified law, or a list of does and don'ts, this person will be seeking to give God the glory in their earthly conduct. In fact this believer does not have a choice, we all do what we want, and for the believer what we want is to please our father, for it is the vibrant,

living faith in us that enables us, and grants us this desire.

That is the difference between the Mosaic Law, the old covenant and the new covenant. We have the holy spirit, indwelling in us to convict us, and to empower us to do God's will. That is why I stopped following this debate because both are arguing that we must do God's will, and we will do God's will because of the Holy Spirit and the faith given to us, so that we will do that which brings Glory to our father in heaven.

So, to sum it up simply and what my thoughts were about it this week...was that those who have faith, not a dead faith but a live working faith, will do what God commands, they will following God's imperatives because of their love for their father, because of the holy spirit in them. Paul says that those who have the spirit, walk in the spirit and against such there is no law. He also said that the law was given as a tutor, a teacher to bring us to Christ, but now that faith has come we are no longer under a tutor for we are all sons of God through faith in Christ. Christ has come, not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. The law still stands, it still condemns the world, the law is still lawful, but those who are Christs, no longer are under the law for Christ has fulfilled the law. But I do not think that Christ came, to fulfill the mosaic law to just put us under another law as some say. It is not the same law, under a different administrator. Jeremiah 31:33 says, and Paul quotes it in Hebrews that God will make a new covenant, and he will put his law on their minds, and write it on their hearts and he will be their god and they will be his people.

I think that really James helps to explain this. It is faith, it is the holy spirit, it is Christ. As Christians we are to be Christ like. We desire to follow Christ, we seek God's will in our lives, we do not need a codified law that we must check that we are following, for if we love Christ, we will do what he commands. If we had a new law to keep then Jame's whole dissertation on living, vibrant true faith wouldn't really need to have happened. This is how we know we are saved, our faith works to do God's will, not because we must in a judicial mosaic law keeping way, but because we desire to, it is written on our hearts, our hearts are new, we have been changed.

Now, on to chapter 3. James launches into warning us about an unbridled tongue, controlling our speech. He launches into this with a warning, saying in verse 1. My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. James here is warning those who would teach, or desire to be teachers of the word for they will be held accountable for what they teach.

It really is a heavy burden put on those who would teach for we need to guard against teaching false doctrines and leading people astray. The bible warns of false prophets, of false teachers who will be held accountable for all those that they led astray. James says in the following verse that we all stumble in many things, while we may be saved, while the holy spirit may be working in us to will and to do that which is pleasing to our father, we still are tainted by our sin nature. No one is perfect, no one is able to justify themselves before God so we must have a alien righteousness, one that is not our own, which is Christ's righteousness laid to our account. James is saying that we all fail, we all sin and he points to our speech as a main culprit.

If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. James then goes on to give examples of this, of a horse, who is a large, stubborn animal that we control to do our will by putting bridles in their mouths, and by controlling the bridle, we are able to turn the whole body. Or how massive ships, are turned by a tiny rudder directing them in the direction the pilot desires. Much the same way our tongue, or our speech directs where we are going.

It is hard to bridle our tongue, often times we speak before we think. We react, sometimes in anger, sometimes out of pride, or arrogance. Verse 7 says For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea is tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no man can tame the tongue, it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

I think that this really flows right from chapter 2. James is not necessarily just jumping to another topic, but rather it is a progression, built upon the previous. Who can bridle their tongue. No man is able to control it of themselves and I think this echos back directly to what he was saying about the works of faith. A faithful person of God will bridle their tongue, they should be aware of what they are saying and working toward building and edifying each other and not using their speech to slander, lie, tear down and cause dissension among brothers and sisters. Will we fail in this, of course for no man is perfect except Jesus Christ. This is such a difficult thing to control, which is why James said, if a man can control his tongue he is a perfect man.

How we conduct ourselves, not only in action as chapter 2 taught us, but also in speech helps to define and assure who we are in Christ. Our speech should be conducted in such a way that it brings honor and glory to our Father in heaven. We can not do that if we are using our speech to brag on ourselves, to lie and deceive another. James uses the same examples that Jesus used that we read last week in Matthew chapter 7. Can a man gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? A good tree will bear good fruit, and a bad tree will bear bad fruit.

James says that with the same mouth we bless God, and curse each other verse 9. With it we bless our God and father, and with it we curse men who have been made in the likeness of God, out of the same mouth proceeds blessings and cursing, my brethren, these things ought not to be so. He then uses the same example in Matthew

Can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? We ought to be striving to not be a person who in our speech bless God and curse each other. If we have the faith of Abraham, a working faith, it too shall be proven not only by our works, but by our speech. Just as we are to conduct our daily lives in such a manner that brings glory and honor to god, we too should be conducting our speech in such a way that we bring glory and honor to god.

A good example I have of this very thing is a co-worker of mine. She does not have a bridled tongue, and her speech is constantly about things of a sexual nature, yet she will then turn around and say something about her bible reading for the day. She is mocked by my other co-workers for this hypocrisy, they see through it and joke that they are surprised that lightning hasn't struck her down yet.

I think this is a good example of exactly something James is talking about here. This type of language, this type of speech and conduct should not come from the mouths of God's elect, his people. We are to be salt and light to the world, we are to be a witness to the world, and how can we do that if we have an unbridled tongue, who will listen when they see your faith as a joke.

What we say, and how we say it is very important, and James here seems to put it at chief importance. Just like a rudder of a ship, our tongue is so set among our members James says in verse 6, that it sets fire to our whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire by hell.

So much damage has been done to the church by our speech. James likens the effect of an unbridled tongue as to that of a fire that burns down an entire forest. How many churches have suffered through

splits because of a person's unbridled tongue? It destroys friendships, it destroys families, and it can destroy our reputation as it has my co-workers.

James also uses the example of a spring of water. Out of it comes fresh water, and bitter water..both blessings and cursings, this ought not to be. Once again it goes back to chapter 2, no matter how much we believe something, it does not make it true if there is no evidence...what comes out of our mouths reveals the true person inside.

Mark 7, 20-23

“What comes out of a person is what defiles them. 21 For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, 22 adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and defile a person

Our tongue is our rudder, if out of our mouth comes sexual immorality, deceit, malice, envy, slander, arrogance and folly...it shows what is inside us and it is that which defiles us. An unbridled tongue, shows forth a faith that is dead.

Our tongue is the easiest thing to use, and the hardest thing to control. And we can not control it, except by the holy spirit's guidance. So, I issue a challenge to all who are listening to this today, much like I did last week, if your faith does not produce good works then you better start to rethink your faith, it is the same with your tongue. Are you prone to lying, foul language, boasting, slander, then you might need to rethink your faith. As we read this morning, work out your salvation in fear and trembling for it is God who works in you to will and to do for his good pleasure.