

The Way of Love

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CHAPTER TEN

Faith and Works

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James poses a question that has echoed through the centuries: *"What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?"* And then he offers a concrete example: if a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them *"Go in peace, be warmed and filled"* without giving them what they need, what good is that?

Genuine faith manifests itself. It does not remain hidden in the heart as a private conviction. It overflows into action. *"So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead,"* James concludes. Not because works save us — Paul is clear that we are saved by grace through faith — but because true faith inevitably produces fruit.

Jesus illustrated this with the parable of the final judgment. The King separates the sheep from the goats, and the criterion is not correct doctrine or attendance at meetings. It is something much simpler: *"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."*

What is astonishing is that the righteous did not even remember doing these things. They did not act to earn points or to be seen. They simply loved — and in loving the least, without knowing it, they loved Christ himself. *"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."*

Paul, the apostle of grace, also understood this. After explaining salvation by faith in Ephesians, he immediately adds: *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."* We are not saved by works, but we are saved for works. It is the very purpose of our new creation.

What does this look like in practice? Not necessarily grand gestures. Jesus spoke of giving a cup of cold water in his name. He spoke of the widow who gave two small coins. Small faithfulnesses matter. The kind word to the discouraged. Patience with the difficult person. Time given to someone who needs it. The quiet generosity that no one applauds.

John summarizes it with meridian clarity: *"Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."* Christian love is not a feeling that stays in the heart. It is action that goes out into the world. It is the hands and feet of Christ moving today, through us, toward a world that desperately needs to see that love embodied.

The question is not how much we can do — there will always be more need than we can cover. The question is whether we are available. Whether when the Spirit prompts, we obey. Whether when we see need, we respond. Not as a heavy burden but as a natural expression of what Christ has done in us. We love because he loved us first. We give because he gave himself first. We serve because he came to serve.