

HOW TO HAVE REAL FAITH
Developing a Faith That Works - Part 7 of 15
James 2:14-26
Rick Warren

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"Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by actions, is dead." (vs. 17)

I. WHO IS RIGHT - JAMES OR PAUL? _____

	Paul (Gal 2:16)	&	James (Ja. 2:24)
Problem:	"Legalism"		"Laxity"
"WORKS"	Jewish laws		Christian lifestyle
Focus:	"Root of salvation"		"Fruit of salvation"
	(internal/unseen)		(external/seen)
Purpose:	How to <u>know</u>		How to <u>show</u>
	I'm a Christian		I'm a Christian

"For it is BY GRACE you have been saved THROUGH FAITH ... FOR a life of GOOD WORKS which God has already prepared for us to do." Eph. 2:8-10 (GN)

II. WHAT IS REAL FAITH?

1. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU _____ .

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man CLAIMS to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such "faith" save him? (vs. 14)

Matt. 7:20-23

2. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU _____ .

"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" (vs. 15-16)

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" 1 John 3:17 Also 3:14-16, 4:7-20

(vs. 17)

3. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU _____ .

"But someone will say, 'You have faith - I have deeds.' SHOW ME your faith without deeds, and I will SHOW YOU my faith by what I do." (vs. 18)

2 Cor. 5:17

4. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU _____ .

"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that -- and shudder!" (vs. 19)

5. REAL FAITH IS SOMETHING YOU _____ .

Illustrations: Two very different people

* Abraham (vs. 20-24)

* Rahab (vs. 25)

2 Cor. 13:5 *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves."*

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It seems if you put the word "real" in front of anything it sells more -- real coffee or real leather. We're interested in the genuine article. There was a TV show that used to be on "Real People". There's a book out Real Men Don't Eat Quiche. Coke used to be the "real thing".

I want to talk to you today about what James has to say about how to have a real faith. There are a lot of phony religions out there -- people who think they are Christians and really aren't. In this passage James talks about the difference between real and counterfeit Christians, authentic believers and fake believers. He talks about how you have a real faith.

This is the most controversial and misunderstood passage in the book of James. Every cult misunderstands it and they try to use this passage to prove you have to work your way to heaven. It's important that you get what I'm going to talk about today so that when those guys come to your door, you'll know what to say to them. The entire New Testament teaches that we are saved by faith alone. "*By grace, through faith, we are saved.*" James comes along and says, "It's not just faith but faith and works." What is he talking about? James and Paul. They are both right. They are talking about different things.

Paul was fighting the problem of legalism -- the problem of "I've got to keep all the Jewish laws and regulations to be a Christian." Paul is talking to that group.

James is not fighting legalism but laxity -- those that say "It doesn't matter what you do as long as you believe."

They are fighting two different enemies. But they both use the word "works" in different ways. When Paul uses the word "works" he's talking about Jewish laws like circumcision and things like that. When James uses it, he's talking about the lifestyle of a Christian -- acts of love. It's totally different. Paul focuses on the root of salvation -- what happens to me internally. James focuses on the fruit of salvation -- what happens on the outside. Jesus said, "*By their fruits you will know them.*" Paul is talking about, "How to know you're a Christian." James is talking about, "How to show you're a Christian." Paul is talking about his passages on faith alone, how to become a believer. James talks about, how to behave like a believer. It is not a contradiction.

It's summed up in Ephesians 2:8-10 "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, for a life of good works that God has already prepared for us to do.*" There are three prepositions in this passage -- "by grace", "through faith", "for good works". If you get those out of order, you're in trouble. If you think you're saved by works, for faith you're in trouble. But he's saying we're saved by grace through faith. We're saved just by accepting God's gift.

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But how do I show I am a believer? James says there's five ways you can know you've got the real thing. He gives us five steps or principles here in this passage.

1. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU SAY

v. 14 Real faith is not just something you say, something you talk about. *"What good is it my brother if a man claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such 'faith' save him?"* It doesn't say he, actually has faith, he just claims to have it. He talks about it. He knows all the right phrases. There are a lot of people who claim to be Christians. George Gallup says that 50 million Americans say "I'm born again," but you don't see anything in their lifestyle. Today we tend to label people as Christians if they make the slightest sound of being a believer. It's more than just talk that is involved in real faith. Jesus said, *"Not everybody who says to me 'Lord, Lord' is going to enter into the kingdom of heaven."* Not everybody with a Christian bumper sticker is a believer. Not everybody who is a professor of Christianity is a possessor of Christianity. *"Can such faith save him? What value is this kind of faith?"* Nothing. Talk is cheap. Remember when Larry Flint, the publisher of Hustler, said he was born again? But you never saw any change in his life. He kept right on printing pornography. No difference. No change.

James is saying that real faith is not just something you say. Do you know anybody that claims to be a Christian but you don't see any evidence in their life? That's a phony faith.

Real faith is not just something you say.

2. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU FEEL

It's more than emotions. A lot of people confuse emotions and sentiment with faith. You can be emotionally moved and never act on it. You can go to church and get a quiver in your liver, goose bumps, but it never makes any difference.

Then he gives an illustration. v. 15 *"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him 'Go, I wish you well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"* I saw a Peanuts cartoon. Charlie Brown and Linus are inside all bundled up and Snoopy's out in the cold shivering in front of an empty dog food bowl. Charlie and Linus are having a discussion on how sad it is that Snoopy is hungry and cold. "He's cold and hungry. We ought to do something about it." They walk outside and say to Snoopy, "Be of good cheer, Snoopy." Do you know where Charles Schultz got that idea? From this verse. What good is it if you see someone in need and you say, "I feel for you!" He's saying, "It's more than just words. It's more than just feelings." If, after church, you're getting into your car and you happen to slam eight fingers in your car door, and you're standing there in agony with blood on your fingers, and I walk up and say, "I really feel for you!" -- is that any help?

Real faith is more than just sympathy and feeling and emotion. You get assistance. You do something about it. You act on it. Real faith takes the initiative. A real believer has real faith and it's practical. It

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gets involved with people. He's talking about Christians here. (This is the only time in Scripture that Christian women are called sisters.) When you become a part of God's family you have some family responsibilities. A real believer will care about other believers.

1 John 3:17 *"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?"* Real faith is generous. It wants to give. Who can count on you in a crisis? How many Christians have the freedom to call you up in the middle of the night if they are in an emergency? Not just talking the talk. Not just feeling for people. I John 3:14 says that one of the proofs of salvation is that we love other Christians. Do you have fellowship with believers? Real faith wants to be around other believers. You love them. It is known we are Christians by our love.

We are a lot better at verbalizing our faith than practicing it. I can't meet everybody's needs but I can meet somebody's. Even Jesus couldn't meet everybody's needs. James is saying that if my faith doesn't lead me to share with others it's wrong. v. 17 *"In the same way, faith by itself if it's not accompanied by actions is dead."* If I don't feel like helping other Christians, I don't have a sick faith, I have a dead faith. James is laying it on the line. He says, "Do you want real faith? It's more than just something you say and it's more than just something you feel."

3. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOME SOMETHING YOU THINK

For some people, faith is an intellectual trip -- a matter to be studied, debated, talked over and discussed. James imagines this intellectual objector v. 18 *"Someone will say 'You have faith, I have deeds'"* He's imagining some intellectual guy who says, "You're into faith, I'm into works. That's cool. Different strokes for different folks. Let's debate it. You've got your thing, I've got mine. To each his own way. Stimulate me mentally but don't ask me to make any commitment." *"Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do."* Circle "show me". Real faith is visible. You can see it. It's apparent. If you claim to be a Christian, people will be able to see it. It's visible. We've got a lot of Lady Clairol Christians -- nobody knows for sure. Only God knows for sure. Faith is odorless, weightless, invisible so anybody can claim to have it. How do you know for sure? James says, "Show me." If you claim to be a Christian I have a right to ask you to prove it by looking at your lifestyle. Somebody said, "Faith is like calories. You can't see them but you can sure see the results." You can't see faith but you can see the results.

James would have made a good Missourian. The theme of the state of Missouri is "Show me". James is saying, "You say you're a Christian? Prove it. Let me see your actions back up your words." If I say, "I believe my health is very important. Personal health is a high priority in my life. I believe that health is one of the most important things we ought to have." You say, "Do you eat right?" No. "Do you exercise? Do you get your proper rest? Do you take vitamins? Do you ever go for a check up?" No. It doesn't matter what I say. What counts are my actions. Real faith is more than just something you think. You can point it out and see it in people's lives. My kids sing a chorus: "If you're saved and you know it then your life will surely show it." That's what James is saying. Show me. You claim to have

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real faith. It's something more than something you say, something you feel, and something you think about. You can prove it. 2 Corinthians 5:17 *"Any time a person becomes a Christian he becomes a new person inside, the old things have passed away. All things become new."* Not overnight. But they start becoming new.

If you grab onto a 220 volt wire you're going to know it. I don't see how somebody as big as God can enter your life and it not change you. James says, flat out that, if it doesn't change you there's a question whether He's really in your life. What can I see in my life that proves it? Jimmy Carter in his book Why Not the Best? said that "one of the things that was a turning point in his life when somebody asked him the question, 'If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?'" That's a good question. That's what James was talking about. If you say "I know it!" Show it! How do you know you're a believer? You'll see some changes in your life. Real faith always produces change. Real faith is not just something you say. It's not just something you feel. It's not just something you think.

4. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU BELIEVE

"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that -- and shudder!" There are a lot of people who have strong beliefs in God, the Bible, about Christ. They can recite creeds to you and catechisms and talk about doctrines of the Trinity, quote bible verses. James says, "big deal!" Just saying I believe in God is not enough to get you to heaven. Even the devil believes that. The Bible says in Proverbs, *"The fool has said in his heart, there is not God."* It's foolish to be an atheist and the devil is no fool. The devil believes in God! The devil is a great theologian. He knows a lot more about the Bible than you do. He's been around a whole lot longer. He knows theology backwards and forwards. He believes. His demons believe and shudder. The Greek word is "to bristle" -- their hair stands up on end. It's the kind of word you'd use reading a Steven King novel. Why? Because the devils understand the majesty and awesomeness of God. They believe in God and they tremble.

The word believe in Greek means "to trust in, to cling to, to rely on, to commit yourself completely." I believe in Hitler but I'm not a Nazi. I'm a Christian because I believe in Jesus. But it's more than just a head knowledge. A lot of folks are going to miss heaven by 18 inches. They've got it in their head but not their heart. They say "I believe in God." James says, "Big deal. Everybody believes in God. How do you have a creation without a Creator? But that's not enough."

Real faith is not just saying "I believe". There is so much easy believism in America. Article in the Register: "Many in Orange Count believe but don't practice." They did a survey and asked people all over Orange County and they found a high degree of belief. "Sure, I'm a believer. I'm a Christian." Do you attend church? "No." "Do you donate your time?" "No." "Do you tithe?" "No." James would say that's a phony belief. You're just conning yourself. A lot of people are doing that.

If it's not just something you say or think or feel or believe, what is real faith?

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5. REAL FAITH IS SOMETHING YOU DO

In the next couple of verses James gives two illustrations that say real faith is something you do. Faith is active. It's not passive. It's a commitment.

Two illustrations of two very different people, Abraham and Rahab -- exact opposite extremes. Abraham is a man. Rahab is a woman. Abraham is Jewish. Rahab is a Gentile. Abraham is a patriarch. Rahab is a prostitute. Abraham is a somebody. Rahab is a nobody. Abraham is a major character in the Bible. Rahab is a minor character. He uses these illustrations to say, it doesn't matter who you are as long as you've got the important thing. They only had one thing in common -- their faith in God. Their faith in God led them to an action.

v. 20 *"You foolish men. Do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. His faith and his actions were working together. His faith was made complete by what he did. Scripture was fulfilled when it said, 'Abraham believed God.'" How do we know it? We saw it. He behaved in a way that his belief came out visibly. "Abraham believed God and it was accredited to him as righteousness and he was called God's friend." You know the story. It's the ultimate test where God asked Abraham to give up his own son. This has nothing to do with salvation. Abraham was already a believer. Twenty-five years earlier God had said, "You're righteous." He's not talking about being saved by his works. He's saying, that this just shows how much you believe. Abraham obeyed God. It was immediate. He followed Him. He took his son up. He did all those faith steps. He cut the wood, built the altar and was ready to sacrifice his own son. Abraham says to his son while walking up the mountain, "We [not I] will return". He knew that God would provide somehow even if it meant raising him from the dead. The fact is God did raise him from the dead, figuratively speaking. Abraham was about to sacrifice him and God says, "I was just testing you to see what's most important in your life." It was an action. His works proved his faith. He held nothing back from God.*

And he talks about Rahab. The story is in Joshua 2. It's the story how a prostitute helped a couple of spies when they were coming into Jericho. Rahab ends up in the family line of Jesus. She risks her life to save the spies.

Our faith is not determined by what we do, it is demonstrated by what we do. About 35 years ago there was a famous tightrope walker named George Blondin who, for a publicity stunt, decided he would walk across Niagara Falls on a tightrope. On the appointed day they stretched a tightrope from one side of Niagara Falls to the other. He got out there and there were crowds lining both the Canadian and American side. Thousands of people showed up to see this unbelievable feat. Blondin walked up to the edge of the tightrope, put one foot on the tightrope and put another foot out and began to walk across -- inch-by-inch, step-by-step. He got out in the middle and everybody knew that if he'd make one mistake in balance he'd fall off the rope and into the Falls and obviously be killed. Blondin got to the other side and the crowd went wild, shouting and cheering. Blondin said, "I'm going to do it again." He got to the other side and the crowds went crazy. Blondin said, "I'm going to do it again but this time I'm going to push a wheel barrow full of dirt." He pushes the wheelbarrow across. He got to the other

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side. He did this nine or ten times. On about the tenth time, he pushed the wheelbarrow right in front of a tourist who said, "I believe you could do that all day." Blondin dumped out the dirt and said, "Get into the wheelbarrow."

In a very real sense that's what God says to you. Talk is cheap. Put your money where your mouth is. "I believe in Jesus!" Prove it. Our faith is demonstrated by our actions. Actions speak louder than words. Our behavior shows what we really believe.

2 Corinthians 13:5 *"Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith."* Test. Check it out. See if you're really a believer or not.

A couple of questions:

Am I really a Christian after all? In the light of what James says, am I really a Christian?

What changes can I point to in my life? Is my lifestyle any different at all from unbelievers? So many people think it doesn't matter what you do as long as you believe. James says that's not true. He's not saying you work your way to heaven. He's not saying works deliver salvation. He's saying they demonstrate it. He's saying, that if your faith doesn't work, what good is it?

How do I know for sure? You settle it in your mind. Maybe some of you have had doubts whether you're really a believer or not. You're a good person, you've gone to church, and maybe you've known about Christ, and you've read the Bible, and you've had religion and you've gone to classes. But are you absolutely sure that if you died tonight you'd go to heaven? The fact is you can be sure. You don't have to leave here and have the shadow of a doubt. You can settle it right here.

How do you do that? Ephesians 2:8-9 *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, for a life of good works God has already prepared for us to do."* God's grace. God reaches down. He says, "I want you to know Me. I want to have a relationship with you." That's grace. And you look up and say "I want to know You, Lord. I want to have a relationship with You." When God's hand of grace comes down and your hand of faith goes up, that's called salvation. That's what it means to be a believer. Saved by grace, through faith to do exactly what God made you to do in the first place. He has a plan for your life. You are not here by accident.

Prayer:

In the closing moments of this time together, some of you have been struggling with doubts about whether you have really been a believer or not. You say, "I don't really remember a time when I specifically asked the Lord to take over my life. I've believed about Christ. Maybe I've never really believed in Him. I want to settle it today." If you're not sure, if you've got those doubts, settle it this morning. Pray this, "Lord, I want to have a real faith, not a phony faith." What does it mean to believe? It means to commit yourself to. It's more than just intellectual knowledge. The devil believes in God. It means commitment. Would you say in your heart right now, "Jesus Christ,

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I give every area of my life to you as best as I know how. I want to give as much of me as I understand to as much of You as I understand and I want to learn more about You. God, I give You my past, all the things that have happened, the good and bad, achievements, the faults, the sins, the mistakes. I ask You to take it all. I admit that I've gone my own way many times. I haven't consulted You. I've made my own decisions without talking to you about them. I ask You to forgive me. Lord, I not only give You my past, I want to give You my future. I don't know what it holds but I know You know it. I want to follow You as best as I know how. I want to be a real believer. Jesus Christ, I want to give You my present, right now. Take my life and make me the person You want me to be. Help me to grow. Help me to know that I'm a Christian and help me to show it in my life by obeying Your word. Thank You for loving me. Thank You for dying for me on the cross. Help me to understand it more. Lord, I want to get into the wheelbarrow this morning. I want to commit all of it to You, the problems and the possibilities of my life."

If you prayed that prayer in your heart and meant it I believe God heard you. The Bible says, *"Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* He says, "You do your part and I'll do my part."

Father, I want to thank You for those who've made this decision this morning in their hearts. Today they're settling it. I pray that Your Holy Spirit will put a confirmation in their heart that today they're giving themselves to You. I know this isn't a promise to be perfect but it is a promise to let You take control. You have said that You will come into our lives and make us new people. Thank You that it wipes out all the things we've done wrong in the past and gives us a new look on life. Thank You that we can become new people when we come and give our lives to You in faith. Lord, thank You for this word. Thank You that it's so clear. We can understand that real faith is not something we say or feel or believe but it is something we do. We commit ourselves to you today. In Jesus' name, Amen.