

HOW TO HAVE REAL FAITH James 2:14-26

Good morning! We're on the second part of our series on the Book of James. I'm calling this series, "Real Faith in the Real World". Last week, we talked about how to deal with your problems from James 1. Today, I'm going to talk about "How to Have Real Faith" from James 2.

It seems if you put the word "real" in front of anything it sells more, like real coffee or real leather. We're interested in the genuine article. There was a TV show called "Real People" during the during the 70's and 80's, a kind of reality show. There's a book called 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 of James 2, James talks about the difference between real and counterfeit Christians, authentic believers and fake believers. He talks about how you have a real faith.

Please turn with me to James 2. I don't have a slide for the passage I'm going to read since it's quite long so if you could please get your Bibles and turn to **James 2:14-26**. Please follow along as I read this passage to you. Read James 2:14-26 (NASB).

This is the most controversial and misunderstood passage in the book of James. At face value, it seems that James is saying that faith and works are needed for salvation. You can't have faith without works and still expect to get to heaven. Because of what it seems to say, even Martin Luther at one time suggested that it shouldn't be taught in schools.

This is a passage that every cult has taken advantage of and uses it to justify their teaching 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.

But first things first. The entire New Testament teaches that we are saved by the grace of God through faith alone. This is Martin Luther's primary contention. *"By grace, through faith, we are saved."* Which was also the underlying theme of Paul's letters. He says in Gal. 2:16, "...know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified." Then James comes along and he says, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." There seems to be a contradiction. What is he talking about? James and Paul. Who is right? They are both right. They are just talking about two different things.

(Show slide comparing Paul and James)

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 the observance of the feasts and things like that. When James uses it, he's talking about the lifestyle of a Christian -- love in action. 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 externally. Jesus says, *"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. So, there is no contradiction.

It's all summed up in Ephesians 2:8-10, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* There are three key phrases in this passage -- "by grace", "through faith", "do 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.

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 facts of faith** in this passage.

1. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU SAY

Verse 14 says, *"What use is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?"* It doesn't say the person actually has faith, the person just claims to have it. The person just talks about it. The person knows all the right phrases. There are a lot of people who claim to be Christians. Last year, more than two-thirds of American adults claim to be Christians but you don't see anything in their lifestyle. And we tend to label people as Christians if they make the slightest sound of being a believer. But it's more than just talk that is involved in real faith.

Jesus says, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matt. 7:21) Not everybody with a Christian bumper sticker is a believer. Not everybody who is wearing a cross is a follower of Jesus. Not everybody who is a professor of Christianity is a possessor of Christianity.

Talk is cheap. I read about an NFL Quarterback who said he was a Christian. Then, in another article he said he watched 50 Shades of Gray with his girlfriend. Talk is cheap. But you have to walk the talk.

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 fake faith.

Real faith is not just something you say. Second,

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.

James gives an illustration. Verse 15, *“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”* 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 dogfood 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? Charles Schultz, btw, was a Christian. 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, as you leave this room and you trip and you fall and you look hurt, then I walk up and say, "I really feel for you!" then do nothing-- 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 gets involved with people. 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 a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" 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. 1 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, when he was on earth, couldn't meet everybody's needs. James is saying that if my faith doesn't lead me to share with others it's wrong. Verse 17, **"In the same way, faith also, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."** 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." Number 3.

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 in verse 18,

"But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works'". He's imagining some intellectual guy who says, "You're into faith, I'm into works. That's cool. Different strokes for different folks. You've got your thing, I've got mine. To each his own way." *"show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."* Take note, "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.

You see, faith is odorless, weightless, invisible so anybody can claim to have it. So, 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." 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 checkup?" 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. There's a kid's song that goes: "If you're saved and you know it, say Amen! Amen! If you're saved and you know it, say Amen, Amen! If you're saved and you know it then your life will surely show it, if you're saved and you know it, say Amen, Amen!" That's what James is saying. Show me. You claim to have 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, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation*

has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Not overnight. But they start becoming new.

If you grab onto a 120 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 was 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

In verse 19, it says, *"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, 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 in God. The Bible says in Psalm 14:1, *"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'* It's foolish to be an atheist and the devil is no fool. The devil believes in God! The devil is not an atheist. 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 for shudder is "to bristle" -- their hair stands up on end.

It's the kind of word you'd use reading a Stephen King novel. Why? Because demons believe in the existence of God and they understand the majesty and awesomeness of God. They believe in God and they tremble.

Now, the word believe in Greek means "to trust in, to cling to, to rely on, to commit yourself completely." I believe that Hitler existed but I'm not a neo-Nazi. I won't put my life on the line for him. I believe in Jesus because he exists and I put my trust in him. So, it's more than just head knowledge. It involves the heart. 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. But that's not enough."

Real faith is not just saying "I believe". There is so much easy believism in America. Earlier I cited a survey last year which was conducted by the Cultural Research Center that said 70% of Americans identified as Christians. The same article, however, said that these self-identified Christians hold many views in conflict with traditional Christian teachings, like same-sex marriage, sex before marriage, abortion, and many don't even acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior! In the end, the researchers concluded that in reality only a tiny minority of American adults (6%), get that, (6%) possess a biblical worldview and demonstrate a consistent understanding and application of biblical principles. Staggering!

James would say that many Christians hold a phony belief. You're just conning yourself. A lot of people, well, self-identified Christians are in the same boat.

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

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.

These two illustrations are 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.

In verse 20 and following, *"But are you willing to acknowledge, you foolish person, that faith without works is useless? Was our father Abraham not justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God'".* How do we know it? We saw it. He behaved in a way that his belief came out visibly. *"And Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called a friend of God."*

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 servants while walking up the mountain with Isaac, *"We (not I) will come back to you".* (Gen. 22:5) 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 James 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.

In the summer of 1859, 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 side. Then, before crossing again with the wheelbarrow, he asked the audience, "Do you believe I can push this wheelbarrow with a man sitting on it?" Everybody shouted, "Yes, we believe!" George asked again, "Who will volunteer?" Suddenly, the crowd went silent.

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? First, by believing that Jesus Christ died for your sins, that he was buried, and that he resurrected. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians (15:3-4), "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Then, receive him in your heart as

your Lord and Savior. Paul says also in Romans (10:9-10), “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” And third, remember that you are saved not by your works but by the grace of God through faith. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9, “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.*”

Friend, it’s all 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. Today is the beginning of the rest of your life.