

Real Faith Really Works
James 2: 14 – 26
March 28, 2010

it seems if you put the word “real” in front of anything it sells more – “real coffee” or “real leather.” There is real TV; there’s a book out “Real Men Don’t Eat Quiche.” And just to remind you of its originality, Coca Cola trumpets it is the “Real Thing!”

Today, I want to talk about what James has to say in James 2: 14 – 26 about “real faith.” There are many phony religions around; many people who present themselves as genuine Christians, but close examination shows they are counterfeit. Jesus spoke of this fact (Matthew 7: 16) when He said you know a person by their fruits – what issues from their everyday lives. Let’s read our passage together (read).

James’ treatise on the subject of “real faith” is the most controversial section of his letter. Many have tried to use it as a proof text to say you must work your way to heaven. The entire New Testament – and certainly Paul – teaches we are saved by faith alone – “by grace through faith...” then James comes along and says, “It’s not just faith, but faith and works.” Martin Luther wanted to take James out of the canon of Scripture because, he said, Catholics were misunderstanding, and misapplying James’ teachings on works. So, is Paul right, or is James? They are both right; they’re talking about different things.

Paul is fighting the problem of legalism: “I’ve got to keep all the Jewish laws and regulations to be a Christian.”

James is not fighting legalism, but spiritual laziness: “It doesn’t matter what you do as long as you believe.”

Actually, the “works” Paul and James were fighting are different enemies. When Paul speaks of “works,” he talking about Jewish laws; when James speaks of “works,” he talking about the Christian’s lifestyle. In essence, Paul is talking about “how to know you’re a Christian.” James is talking about “how to behave as a Christian.” They are not in contradiction with each other.

It is summed up in **Ephesians 2: 8 – 10** (read). There are three propositions in these verses: “by grace;” “through faith;” and “for good works.” Get these out of order, and you are in trouble. So, how do I show I am a believer? James says there are five ways you can know you have the “real thing.”

1. Real faith is not just something you say (James 2: 14)

A. James does not say his hypothetical person has faith; he *just* says he has it. He talks about it, using all the proper phrases, without any tangible evidence.

1. George Gallop says 50 million Americans claim to be “born again.” Yet most could not demonstrate by their behavior any changes caused by that experience.

2. Not everybody who is a *professor* of Christianity is a *possessor* of Christianity.

B. James would say anyone who claims to be a Christian, but gives no evidence of such, has a phony, counterfeit faith.

2. Real faith is not just something you feel (v. 15)

A. Faith is more than a collection of emotions. Many people confuse emotions and sentiment with faith; but they are never moved to act upon their feelings.

1. Peanuts cartoon: Charlie Brown and Linus Van Pelt are all bundled up against a bitter cold day; they walk by Snoopy's house and see him shivering in front of an empty dog food bowl. Linus comments on how sad it is that Snoopy is cold and hungry. Charlie says to Snoopy, "Be of good cheer, Snoopy." I read that Charles Schultz got the idea from this verse.

B. Faith is more than words – even sincere, well-meaning words.

1. Real faith carries a substance gene. It takes the initiative, and gets involved with others and their needs.

D. Trivia point: this is the only time in Scripture Christian women are referred to as "sisters."

1. 1 John 3: 17 – *"But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"*

E. Would others say about us that we are better at verbalizing our faith than we are at practicing it?

3. Real faith is not just something you think (v. 17)

A. For some people, faith is an intellectual trip – a matter to be studied, debated, and discussed. James imagined this intellectual professor...

1. "You're into faith; I'm into works. You've got your thing; I've got mine. To each his own. Let's debate it; stimulate me mentally."

B. Listen, faith is odorless, colorless, weightless. But it must have identifiable results.

1. Wendy's Big Baconator has calories, and while you can't actually see them, you surely can see their influence!

C. James could easily have been from Missouri, because he was big on "Show me."

1. Remember the little children's song that says in part, "If you're saved and you know it, then your life will surely show it..."

2. If you grab a wire carrying 220 volts you will surely know it.

3. I never met anyone who, having opened their life to the God of the universe, was not changed by the experience (2 Corinthians 5: 17)

4. Real faith is not just something you believe (v. 19)

A. You say, "I believe in God, the Bible, about Christ; I believe in the catechisms of the Church, and the doctrine of the Trinity."

1. James would say, "Big deal! Even the devil believes all those things."

B. The word "Believe" in Greek means "to trust in, to cling to, to rely on, to commit yourself completely" Believing in Jesus is more than "head knowledge."

1. Some people are going to miss heaven by just 18 inches: the distance from the head to the heart.

So, if its not just something you feel or do, what is real faith?

5. Real faith is something you do (vs. 20 – 22)

A. Faith is active; it is not passive; it's a commitment.

B. Abraham and Rahab could not have been more different:

1. Abraham was the father of the Jewish race; he was a patriarch, and a major character in the Bible.

2. Rahab was a pagan, a prostitute in the ungodly city of Jericho, and a minor figure in the biblical accounts.

C. James uses the examples of these two disparate persons to demonstrate they had one thing in common: faith in God.

1. While the circumstances that called for their faith were very different, the common trait each had was that their faith was not *determined* by what they did but *demonstrated* by what they did.

Ask yourself: “What changes can I point to in my life that reflect the presence of Jesus Christ? Is my lifestyle any different at all from unbelievers?” So many people think it doesn’t really matter what you do as long as you believe. James, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that’s not true. He is saying, “Demonstrate the reality of the effects faith has worked in your life.”

Let’s pray!