

"In the beginning  
was the Word,  
and the Word was  
with God, and the  
Word was God."  
—John 1:1

The Lord's Flock  
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PASTORAL GROWTH SERIES



## **“The Real Faith that Really Works”**

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In James 2:14-26, the Lord said, *“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 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 be filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have work, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe- and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”- and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”*

So, faith without action is dead. Now, let us talk about real faith. James has a say about how to have real faith. In this passage, James talks about the difference between real Christian, authentic believers and fake believers. He talks about how you can have real faith.

The Book of James became a controversy. Many people misunderstood this and used this passage to prove that you have to work your way to heaven, but the entire New Testament teaches us that we are saved by faith alone, by grace through faith. James came along and said, “it is not just faith but faith and works.” Paul also said something about the matter and according to him, faith alone can save us.

Martin Luther wanted to try to take James out of the canon of the scriptures because of how Catholics misunderstood his teachings on works.

So, who among the two is correct? James or Paul? The answer is both. They are both right but they are talking about two very different things. On one hand, Paul was fighting the problem of legalism. He was talking to the group that believed that you had to keep all the Jewish laws and regulations to be a Christian. On the other hand, James was not fighting legalism but laxity. He was ministering to those who said that it did not matter what you did for as long as you believed, you would be saved. They were fighting different enemies and they both used the word ‘works’ in different ways.

When Paul used the word ‘works,’ he was talking about the Jewish law like, for instance, circumcision. When James used the aforementioned word, he was talking about the Christian lifestyle, acts of love. These two usages are very different. Paul talked about the root of salvation or what happened internally. St. James focused on the fruit of salvation or what happened on the outside. Jesus verified this by saying in Matt 7:16, *“By their fruit you will recognize them...”*

Paul is talking about how to know that you are a Christian and James is talking about how to show it. They are talking about two very different things. Many of us say, "I'm a Christian." But, it cannot be seen in their lifestyle, for they are not living a Christian life.

So, how do you show that you are a Christian? Paul was talking about how to become a believer and James was talking about how to behave like a believer. They talked about different things. They are not contradicting each other.

In Ephesians 2:8-10, Paul said, *"for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that is not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we would walk in them."*

Let us take a closer look at this passage. There are three prepositions: by grace, through faith and of good works. If you think you are saved by works, not faith, you are in trouble for you are saved by grace, through faith. You are saved just by accepting God's gift.

So, how do you show that you are a believer? According to St. James, there are five ways to know that you have got the real thing. There are five steps or principles here in this passage.

A good example of James' 'faith without action is dead.' is Juan Tamad. He knew that the guava will eventually fall off the tree. So, he lay down under the fruit and opened his mouth so he could catch it when it fell. In other words, he had faith that the guava would fall, but he did nothing.

What is faith? Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about things that we do not see. Juan Tamad can see the guava. He could simply have stretched out his hand and grabbed it but he did nothing. Many Christians are like him. They believe in God but they are not putting their faith in action.

Let us not be like Juan Tamad. If you want the guava, take it. Yes, you believe that God is coming, even if you do not see Him, but you need to start taking action. However, some Christians are not doing anything.

### **James' Five Principles Regarding Real Faith That Really Works**

#### **1. Real faith is not just something you say.**

1. Real faith is not just something you talk about. If it something you just talk about, it means you do not actually have faith; but, you just claim to have it. Some people just talk about it. They know the right phrases. There are a lot of people who claim to be Christians.

#### Brief Sharing:

When the doctor said you are healed, believe him/her. There are people who are not content about one doctor's statement. They try to find more doctors that will say that they are healthy. Look at what happened to me. A doctor said my right knee would have to be replaced, but I said no. Another doctor said that something had to be injected on my knee because I surely lack something;

however, I said no again. My wife, then, said I should have my knee checked so I visited another doctor. After the check up, the doctor said that my knee was perfectly fine. I asked the doctor if I

needed whatever it was that the other doctors said I would need. The doctor said there was no need. "So why does my knee hurt?" I asked. The doctor answered, "I don't know. I don't know what I'm going to do with you. I'm just going to give you some medicine. Take them every time

your knee starts giving you trouble. ” The doctor said before handing me the medicine. I took a few and now my right knee no longer hurts. Why? Because every time I visited my doctor I would say, “Lord, you are the greatest physician and I put my hope in You alone.” Yes, I believe in doctors because God use them as instruments of healing, but they are not always correct.

When Dr. Reyes first saw me, he concluded that I was going to be operated again because, judging by my size, it was impossible that my heart, which underwent open heart surgery years ago, was well. I rebuked him. I ,then, had my check up and the result was that my heart was perfectly normal. When Dr. Reyes saw me after my check up, he stood up and said, “God’s favor really rests in you. Your heart is perfect. It’s unbelievable.” And all my succeeding check ups over the years generated the same result- perfectly healthy heart. Why? Because every time I received the Holy Communion, I tell the Lord, “Lord, may your body and blood pass through my heart and melt all the blockages in it.” Is there anything impossible for God? There is nothing for He is the God of the impossible. That is my faith, so I never doubt. The one who doubts will not receive anything from the Lord.

2. According to a survey, 50 million Americans are born again Christians but their lifestyle have not changed.
3. Why do celebrities want to be Born Again Christians? Because it is easy for them. They do not have to attend the Holy Mass and go to confession. They also love the, "once saved, always saved" belief for it does not matter what they do on earth, they will be saved. They do not have to change their lifestyle.
4. Many of us commit to the Lord with our lips. We say, “Yes, Lord. I'll be there Lord. I'll do it for you Lord.” but we take no action to fulfill our promises to God.
5. It is more than just talk that is involved in real faith. Jesus said, not everybody who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” is going to enter the kingdom of God.
6. Not everybody with a Christian bumper sticker is a believer. In America, there are a lot of people with Bible verse stickers on their car. However, their lifestyles remain unchanged. Their cars can still be seen parked outside beer houses and night clubs where prostitutes entertain people.
7. Not everybody who is a professes Christianity is a possessor of Christianity.
8. When you say you are a Catholic, be bold and show them that you are.
9. An example of this is Larry Flynt, the publisher of the Hustler, a pornographic magazine. He says he is a Born Again Christian ,but you can not see the positive change in his life. He kept on printing pornography.
10. Real Faith is not just something you say. Do you know anybody who claims to be a Christian but you do not see any evidence in their life? What they have is phony faith, for real faith is not just something you say.

## **2. Real Faith is not just something you feel.**

1. It is more than emotions.
2. A lot of people confuse emotions and sentiments with faith. You can be emotionally moved and never act on it. You can go to church and get quivers and goose bumps but it may never make any difference. What good is it if you see someone in pain or in need of food and say, “I pity you.” without doing anything to help him/her?
3. Real faith is more than just sympathy, feeling and emotion. You need to assist people. Do something about the situation. You need to act.
4. Real faith is practical faith because takes the initiative, delivers and gets involved with people. When you become part of God's family, you have some family responsibilities. Real believers will care about other believers. According to 1 John 3:17, *“But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?”*
5. Real faith is generous. It wants to give. People can count on you in times of crisis. Christians are free to call you in the middle of the night if they are in an emergency situation. It is not just about talking, and it is not just about feeling for people. One of the

proofs of salvation is that we love other Christians. We have fellowship with other believers. Real faith wants to be around other believers. You love them. It is known that we are Christians by our love. We love better by practicing faith than verbalizing it.

6. If you do not feel like helping another Christian, you have dead faith.
7. James said real faith is more than just something you feel.

### **3. Real faith is not just something you think.**

- For some people, faith is an intellectual thing. Something you talk about, debate over, and discuss.
- James imagined this intellectual objector. In James 2:18, it is written, "... *"You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*"
- This passage is like this, "You have your thinking, I have mine. Let us debate about this. Stimulate me mentally but do not ask me to make any commitment."
- Pay attention to the word 'show.' This is applicable because real faith is visible. It can be seen because it is apparent. If you claim to be a Christian, people will be able to see it.
- So who has faith? Only God knows for sure because faith is odorless, weightless, and invisible so anybody can claim to have it.
- So, how do you know for sure? James said, "Show me." It has to be shown for you to know that it exists. If you claim to be a Christian, people have the right to ask you to prove it by your Christian lifestyle.
- Faith is like calories, you can not see them but you know they are there because you can see the result.
- James is saying, " If you say you are a Christian, prove it. Let me see if your actions back up your words."
- It does not matter what we say, what counts is our action.
- Real faith is not just something we think. You can point it out in other people's life.
- Real faith can be proven.
- In 2 Cor. 5:17-18, the Lord said, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. But all things are of God, who reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and gave to us the ministry of reconciliation."*
- Let us ask ourselves: "Eversince I received Jesus, has anything changed in my life?" If you say yes, prove it by showing it.
- Let us focus on verse 18, which says our change came from God. If we say that we are changed by Christ, we should really change. Ask the grace of God to change because we can not change ourselves. We must not forget that the Holy Spirit was sent to us by the Lord to help us.
- We should be able to back up our words with actions for faith is not just something we think. It is something we can show others.
- Although it does not happen overnight, real faith always produces change.

### **4. Real faith is not just something you believe.**

- You believe that there is one God. That is good but even the demons believe that. It is written in James 2:19, *"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe-and shudder!"*
- There are a lot of people who have a strong belief in God, the Bible, and Christ. They can recite catechism to you. They can talk about doctrines and the Holy Trinity. They can quote Bible verses.
- According to James, just saying that you believe in God is not enough to get you to heaven for even the devil believes in the Lord.

- God said in Psalm 14:1, *"For the director of music. Of David. The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good."*
- It is foolish to be an atheist but the devil is no fool. The devil believes in God. The devil is a great theologian. He knows a lot about the Bible than you do. He's been around a whole lot longer. He knows theology backwards and forwards.
- The Greek word of believe means: to cling to, to trust in, to rely on, and to commit yourself completely.
- You are a Christian because you believe in Jesus but it is more than just knowledge. Many Catholics will miss heaven by 18 inches. Why? Because they have it in their heads but not in their hearts. The brain is approximately eighteen inches away from the heart.
- Real faith is not just saying, "I believe."
- According to a recent article in Southern California, many believe but do not practice. They conducted a survey and based on the data gathered, many people believed but they neither go to church nor donate time and tithes. James would say to these people that they have phony belief and are just fooling themselves.

## 5. Real faith is something you do.

- Real faith is action for faith is active. It is not passive. .
- Let us take a closer look at commitment for two very different people: Abraham and Rahab. They are exact opposites. Abraham is a man and Rahab is a woman. Abraham is Jewish and Rahab is a gentile. Abraham is a patriarch and Rahab is a prostitute. Abraham is somebody and Rahab is nobody. Abraham is a major character in the Bible and Rahab is a minor character. James used this illustration to say that it does not matter who you are as long as you have got the important things. They only had one thing in common and that is their faith in God. Their faith in God led them into an action.
- In James 2:20-22, it is written, *"Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;"*
- Twenty-five years before Abraham sacrificed his son, God already told him that he was righteous. James is not talking about being saved by works. This just shows how he believed God. Abraham obeyed God immediately. When the Lord told Abraham to offer his son, Abraham did not even think twice. He took his son. He cut the wood, built the altar, and was ready to sacrifice his own. But look at Abraham's faith. He knew he would sacrifice Isaac but this is what he said to his young men, as it is written in Gen. 22:5, *"Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go yonder. We will worship, and come back to you."* Despite the fact that he knew that he was going to sacrifice his son, he said they would come back. He believed that Isaac would survive, that God would provide a way out even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead. The fact is that God did raise Isaac back from the dead figuratively speaking. Abraham was about to sacrifice his son, but God stopped him from hurting the boy.
- Abraham acted and his works proved his faith. We too should never hold anything back from God.
- The Lord wants Catholics who act. We should have faith and works.
- Rahab is the prostitute in Joshua 2 who helped the two Jew spies escape.
- Our faith is not determined by what we say; It is demonstrated by what we do.
- Sometimes, we say, "Yes Lord. I will do that. We can do it together Lord." But, when the time came to do it, we are nowhere to be found. We should not be like that.
- If you say that you believe God, you should trust Him. You should never fear that anything bad will happen to you.
- It is written in Isaiah 55:11, *"so is my word that goes out of my mouth: it will not return to me void, but it will accomplish that which I please, and it will prosper in the thing I sent it to do."*
- Our faith is demonstrated by our action. Action speaks louder than words. Our behavior

show what we really believe.

- The Lord said in 2 Cor. 13:5, *“Examine your own selves, whether you are in the faith. Test your own selves. Or don’t you know as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless indeed you are disqualified.”*

### **Two Questions to Ponder On:**

1. Am I a true Christian?
2. What changes can I point to in my life? Is my lifestyle any different at all from unbelievers?

Many people think it does not matter what you do as long as you believe. The Holy Spirit, through James, is not saying you can work your way to heaven. He is not saying works deliver salvation. He is saying that works demonstrate your faith. He is saying that if your faith does not work, what good is it? How do you know for sure? Maybe some of you have doubts whether you are a believer or not. You are a good person. You have gone to church. You have read the bible. You are a Catholic. But, are you absolutely sure that if you died tonight you would go to heaven? The fact is you can be sure that you are going to heaven. You do not have to live here and have a shadow of a doubt. You can settle it right now. If you are doubting now, ask the Lord to remove your doubts. Ask the Lord to give you real faith with action. How do you do that? The answer is found in Eph. 2:8-9, *“for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.”*

God reaches down and says, “I want you to know me. I want to have a relationship with you.” That is grace. You look up and say, “I want to know you Lord. I want to have a relationship with you.” When God’s hands of grace come down and your hands of faith go up, that is called salvation. That is what it means to be a believer. You believe in Him alone as your way to salvation for He paid the price for your sins and can forgive them. That is what it means to be saved by grace through faith to do exactly what God made you do in the first place. He has a plan for your life. The Lord said in Jer. 29:11, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says Yahweh, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future.”*

You are not here by accident. Starting today, all of us will have real faith with action- faith that really works.

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