

## Is it Real?

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If you watch TV a lot, I'm sure you have notice all the commercials that try to get you to order some great new product. We're always seeing cooking pans that nothing will stick on. We see weird looking tools that will be the only tool you'll ever use if you order one. Of course, if you order one, they'll send you another free or half price. Then you have the smiling big guy that tries to sell Flex Seal. It's the greatest rubberized leak sealer for cracks and holes. I had a weak moment and bought a tube to try here at church a few years ago. It actually worked very well and still does. Then we have the smiling guy, Mr. My Pillow who makes the greatest pillow ever – plus the greatest bed sheets, greatest towels, and etc. Many of these items sound good, but often they're not as great as they appeared on TV. I do have to say I do like my My Pillow. It is nice to see when we buy an item from a commercial on how great it and when you use it, it is. I got sick of shaving with razors that shaved more skin off than facial hair. I saw a commercial about Harry's razor stuff and tried it. They are the best razors and shaving cream I've ever used. They come as advertised. I had a friend who bought one of the pans you see on TV, the copper ones I believe, and they had stuff that would stick on the pans. When we go around telling others that we are a Christian, do we come as advertised? When we are tested, do we show to be a true Christian or do we break down and become just another false advertisement? As we continue in the journey through James, he gives us some guidance on this through the Holy Spirit.

Let's turn to James 2: 14 – 26 where we read this, "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my

faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the alter? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,’ and he was called God’s friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (NIV)”

During the Reformation Period, this piece of Scripture was greatly debated. Martin Luther didn’t like how people could buy indulgences or reduce punishment after death in the Catholic Church. If you donated enough money or did enough good deeds, you could wipe out your punishment. The Church at that time made a lot of money. One of the reasons why there are many old beautiful churches in Europe. If Uncle Joe died, you could go and buy a trinket at your local church to reduce his sentence in Purgatory. The Church sometimes sold trinkets to help raise money to build a new building. Luther also didn’t believe the Church had the power to pardon people’s sins. That could only happen by confusing sin to Jesus Christ. So, Luther had some issues with James because he feared people would take it the wrong way. He thought people may misinterpret James to say doing good deeds can earn your way to heaven. There was a lot of false teaching going on during the Reformation period and Martin Luther was always writing pamphlets fighting against false teaching. People during this time period were not well educated and the printing press was just getting started so many people didn’t have a Bible. During our time period, there are Bibles everywhere and people still misuse this part of Scripture from James. James starts off by asking if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds how can such faith save them? Now, we know how we are saved. Paul makes that very clear in Ephesians 2: 8 – 9, “God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things

we have done, so none of us can boast about it. (NLT, 1874)” Hebrews adds this in chapter 12: 2, “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (KJV)” So, the first thing we see here is that salvation comes only from Jesus Christ, not by doing good works. It is through faith that a righteous person has life – Romans 1: 17. Then, the Hebrews writer tells us that our faith is a gift from Jesus because He is the author of it. This is why we can’t boast about saving ourselves through good deeds – we can’t save ourselves by doing good deeds. Our salvation and our faith is a gift from the Lord. Now, James is not disputing this. James is just adding onto Paul’s theology. To me, verse 17 is key to faith and good deeds in James, “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (NIV)”. This is key to what James is telling us. Our faith is like a coin – it’s two sided. The coin of faith has two sides and the main side is our faith in Jesus Christ. It’s how it gets started. This is the important side. However, James is telling us there is another side of our faith. In other words, our faith is to be lived out to where people see it. This is on the back side of the coin of faith. We need both sides of the coin because James tells us that if there is no action behind our faith, it is “dead”. The Greek term used for dead is “nekros” which means dead physically and figuratively both persons or things (Strong’s Concordance). James is telling us that faith by itself will become dead. If faith is not accompanied by action or deeds, faith will become dead. One commentary called dead faith as “claimed faith”. We claim we have faith, but we show no evidence of it. James uses the example of someone seeing someone in need, but only gives a verbal response instead of giving them a helping hand. It’s a lot easier to just say kind words instead of actually living out the compassion of Jesus.

Then James puts faith and deeds together in verse 18 and he is correct here when he says, “I will show you my faith by my deeds.” James then tells us that if we say we believe there is one God, but show no evidence of it, we’re in the same boat as Satan’s demons because they believe there is one God and they shudder. They have head knowledge, but no heart for God. Their actions are evil. Jesus showed us an example of what should makes us different with believing God from

the heart. Jesus showed His love for us by dying on the cross. He showed action. It's wasn't words only. Jesus lived out His love. The New Testament Church did the same thing. They believed in Jesus. They had faith in Him, but it didn't stop there. They reached out to those around them and they showed them Jesus by their actions out of love. James gives the example of Abraham who followed God's command when God told him to go and sacrifice his one and only son on the alter. Abraham believed that God would provide somehow because God had told Him he would be the father of Israel through his descendants. Abraham had the faith that God would keep His promise and he knew God would either provide another son or maybe bring his son back to life again. So, Abraham was ready to plunge his knife into his only son, but God stopped him and God provided a ram to sacrifice instead of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham showed that his faith in God was real because he showed his deed of putting his only son on the alter. In the book called "The Hiding Place", Corrie tells the story about her sister Nollie, who is confronted by Germans and asked if one of the girls they are hiding is Jewish and Nollie won't lie because she believes lying is a sin against God. So, she tells them that the girl is Jewish and the girl is taken away. Nollie actually believed that since she wouldn't lie even to a German officer, God would take care of that Jewish girl. After a few weeks, there is a break-in at the prison and the girl is freed. Nollie's action showed her faith in her Lord. If you have never read this book, I would encourage you to do so because you will see faith in action throughout this book that is about a Christian family dealing with life during the Nazi occupation.

James adds onto this in verse 24, where again he stresses, "You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone." Apostle Paul adds this in Ephesians 2: 10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (EVS, 1160". In other words, our salvation that is a gift from God, should produce good works. Actually, this is what God wants to see from us. Doing good deeds is actually a branch from God's gift of salvation to us. Jesus was always helping people and the early Church was always helping people. To go back to the book "The Hiding Place" by Corrie Ten Boom, they knew they would get

caught at some point by the Germans for hiding and protecting Jews during the Holocaust. About everybody in the town knew what the Ten Boom family was doing. Someone was bound to tell on them, but that family continued to help the Jews anyway. They did this knowing this was what God wanted them to do. Their faith had action or we can say they had action faith. We say we love Jesus, but does our actions show evidence to that? Do we love reading God's Word every day? Do we love to talk to Jesus everyday through prayer? Do we love people and does our actions show evidence to that? James finishes his good deed talk by saying this, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (NIV)" They both go together. Christlike love produces good deeds. When the body becomes dead and the spirit leaves, the body becomes stiff and starts to decay. The same goes with our faith in Jesus. When we don't allow our faith to produce deeds through the Holy Spirit, our faith will become stiff and start to decay. Jesus tells us this in Matthew 16: 27, "For I, the Son of Man, will come in the glory of my Father with His angels and will judge all people according to their deeds. (NLT, 1442)" We need to pay attention to this. So, the question we have to ask ourselves is what are we doing for the Lord? What is our faith producing? If our faith has become stiff and is decaying, we need to take it to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to allow His Holy Spirit to give us a jumpstart so we can start doing His work again.

*ESV Holy Bible.* Crossway: Wheaton, 2001

*NLT Life Application Study Bible.* Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996

*The Strongest Strong's Concordance.* Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.