

SERIES: The Book of James: The “How To” Book. (Slide #1)

TITLE: “Talk’s Cheap – Let’s See Some Action”

TEXT: James 2:14-26

DATE: July 20, 2008

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. We continue our walk through the book of James – what I have chosen to call the “How To Book.”
1. The goal of James is in many ways similar to that of all the other writers of the scripture – to tell people how to live the Christian faith.
 2. But more than any other writer, one might say that James cuts through all of the theology and theory and “cuts the chase”: how to live.
 3. Let me remind you of the outline distributed at the beginning of this series published by Paul A Cedar of *The Communicators Commentary*. Copies are available at the welcome center.
 - a. Paul’s outline is helpful because he summarizes the entire book of James with “How to” statements – 23 statements in all.
 - b. I have to believe that even James would like Paul Cedar’s outline.
- B. As we now come to our text in **James 2:14-26**, we arrive at the verses that may be called the theme verses of the entire book.
1. The central theme is PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY – the thread woven throughout the book.
 2. Central to the theme is the relationship between faith and works.
 3. He’s introduced that theme in chapter 1, verse 22, stating that we must not only be hearers of the Word but also doers of the Word.
 4. He says this because he knows full well that the result of being hearers of the word and not doers is deception:
 - a. We are deceived into thinking that we are something that we are not.
 - b. Our head knowledge tries to convince us that we are something that we are not.
 - c. To put it plainly: **James offers a word that is vitally important to every culture including ours in the year 2008 and it is this: We are not so much defined by what we know, but by what we do with what we know. THAT’S A GOOD, PRACTICAL WORD.**
 - d. Such a word goes contrary to what many say in our culture:
 - (1) One will say, “I have a faith that is very private.”
 - (2) One will say, “I don’t like to display my faith in public – it’s a personal thing.”
 - (3) One will say, “My faith is personal – It’s not something I like to flaunt.”
 - (4) One will say, “I have my own personal faith just like everyone else and I don’t need to be a part of a faith community or to have it formalized.”
 - e. I could give you more examples – and so could you. Thankfully to each of these statements James offers a single response: **YOU’RE FULL OF BOLOGNA! THAT’S PURE NONSENSE.**
- C. To summarize what James is saying throughout the entire book of James we read the words found in **James 2:20 and 24**:
1. **Verse 20 – “faith without words is dead”**
 2. **Verse 24 – “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”**

- D. Just to set the record straight: James is not in disagreement with Paul:
 1. Paul spoke to those who were trying to get saved by works and says that we are justified by faith and not by works.
 2. James, building upon Paul, goes on to say that once we are saved by faith, then works follows.
 3. Putting the two together, Paul and James collectively are saying: It is by faith alone that one is saved, and once saved, our faith must prove itself with fruit.
- E. Having laid the foundation, let's now read what James has to say to us and then break it down. **READ WITH ME JAMES 2:14-26. (Slide #2)**
- F. The question of this morning in light of these verses is: "What is the biblical relationship between faith and works?"
- G. We will answer that question in two steps. . . .
 1. **STEP ONE: Faith and Works Defined.**
 2. **STEP TWO: Faith and Works Combined.**

II. (Slide #3) STEP ONE: Faith and Works Defined.

- A. Obviously if we are going to understand James then we must first understand what he means when he uses the terms "faith" and "works."
- B. (Slide #4) FAITH DEFINED.
 1. The trick with some words in the Bible is that when we translate them into English, they can actually get watered down based upon our common usage.
 2. The word faith is one of those words that can be thrown around in today's culture with multiple meanings:
 - a. Sometimes we'll say to someone who is hoping that something will happen: "You just have to have faith." Faith in that sense is nothing more than hopeful anticipation.
 - b. We will often say that someone is "A person of faith." All we mean by that is that they are religious.
 - c. In the church we will say that a person is "of the faith" which simply means that they have asked Jesus into their hearts and are Christian.
 - d. We will often tell someone that we have "faith in them" and by that we mean that we have great confidence in them to be or do a certain thing.
 - e. If we dialogued a little we would come up with several other ways we use the word "faith."
 3. The question is, "What does James mean when he uses the word "faith?"
 - a. The good news is that in the Greek language there is only one word for faith, the word "pistis" in the noun form and "peitho" in the verb form..
 - b. The meaning was pretty uniform in all cases of the usage.
 4. According to James, to have "pistis" or to exercise "peitho" – to have or exercise faith is specific in meaning:
 - a. (Slide #5) Faith = "firm persuasion."
 - b. (Slide #6) Faith = "absolute conviction"
 - c. (Slide #7) Faith = unwavering confidence"
 - d. (Slide #8) Faith = "the foundational core of what we believe." It is "our essence" of being from which all other things flow.
 - e. (Slide #9) Faith = that part of us that is so stubbornly firm that one could accuse us of being "narrow-minded" or "unreasonably stubborn."
- C. Before going on to define what is meant by "works" in this passage, such a definition of faith begs the

question: Are WE men and women of faith? Are we firmly persuaded, absolutely convicted, unwavering in our confidence, unreasonably stubborn in our belief that Jesus is the only way and that His standards and expectation must without question also be our? IF NOT, THE FIRST THING WE NEED TO GET ESTABLISHED IS OUR FAITH.

D. **(Slide #10) WORKS DEFINED:**

1. Equally important to understanding what James means by “faith” is the necessity of understanding what James means by “works.”
2. Throughout the scriptures the word “works” is used in two ways: the works of the flesh and the works of the Spirit.
3. The classic passage of scripture that offers these two together is found in **Galatians 5**.
 - a. In **Gal. 5:19-20** Paul declares that for those who are controlled by the “sinful nature,” the acts of works of that nature are evident: *“sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like.”* These will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.
 - b. However, Paul goes on to list the acts/works/fruit of the Spirit in **verses 22-23**: *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*
4. In Galatians the words that are used in to the sinful nature and life in the Spirit are “acts” and “fruit,” but they mean the same as what James is saying here.

E. **(Slide #11)** For James, the word “works” means “the necessary lifestyle that is a result and evidence of our internal faith.

1. For Paul, in **Galatians 5**, he states in **verses 16-18** that a person is either “controlled” by their sinful nature or by the Holy Spirit.
2. In other words, Paul – as well as James – understands that while we can control what we believe – have our faith in – once that faith is established, then the actions that come from that faith are almost out of our control.
 - a. If the sinful nature is our essence, we will act like sinners.
 - b. If our faith is in God and we are thus inhabited by Him, then the necessary result – fruit if you will – is that we will do what the Spirit tells us to do. Our works will match our faith.
3. With such an understanding, it is inconceivable in James’ mind that a person can say they have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and not have a lifestyle that matches such a statement. In fact, if one says that one has faith in God and then sins, by virtue of their action they have proven their faith statement to be a lie. Ones faith must align itself with ones works.

F. Listen to this critical statement: **(Slide #12)** FOR JAMES FAITH AND WORKS IN PERMANENTLY INTERTWINED AND CAN NEVER BE SEPARATED. One of two things will happen:

1. Either our faith will tell us what we must do resulting in our actions proving our faith.
2. OR, our works will tell our faith what to believe.
3. One cannot say that they believe something and not prove it with their actions. For James, such a thought is pure foolishness. . . .And he’s right.

G. So that leads us to the second step in understanding James’s words here in James 2:14-26

III. **(Slide #13) STEP TWO: Faith and Works Combined.**

- A. Based upon our understanding of what James means by the words “faith” and “works,” James teaches us the following truths:
- B. **(Slide #14) Truth #1:** Our faith must include appropriate works.
 1. James says in **verse 14**, *“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no*

deeds?”

2. He goes on to offer an illustration that anyone could understand (**verses 15-16**):
 - a. Suppose a person approaches you and is in need of food or clothing.
 - b. If you were to say to him or her “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed” but do not help them, then what good is your faith.
 - c. To say “go and keep warm and well fed” without giving the clothes to keep warm with and food to eat is as silly as saying I have faith but I’m not going to live it.
 3. Based upon his understanding that faith in God means that one loves as God loves, James lesson is clear: you can’t say you love God and not match it with works that demonstrate that love.
 4. Our faith must include appropriate – in other words matching – works.
 5. Paul Cedar, in his commentary, tells of a conference he went to that was offered to lay leaders in the church.
 - a. In the midst of the conference the question was asked them, “how many friends they had in the church whom they could call for help if they encountered an emergency in the middle of the night.
 - b. To the surprise and dismay of the speaker, not one of the fifty in the room of lay church leaders could identify one person they felt they could call in the middle of the night if they had an emergency. (They’d probably all call the pastor)
 - c. James word to that group would have been something like this: “You have missed the mark! Genuine faith must include appropriate works—even being available to be awakened in the middle of the night in order to respond to the needs of a brother or a sister.
 6. If we say we have faith, can we prove it with appropriate works? It’s a critical question.
- C. **(Slide #15) Truth #2:** Our faith must be accompanied by action.
1. James states in **verse 18**, “*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*”
 2. James’ illustration is effective: “*You believe that there is one God. Good. Even the demons believe that – and shudder.*” (**Verse 19**)
 3. In other words, “there are plenty of people – even demons – who can issue faith statement. But in essence such statements are useless unless they result in an action that proves the faith statement to be true.”
 4. If in fact actions are controlled by what we believe, then to make statements of faith without action is to make false statements.
 5. Let me offer this simple illustration – and it’s not meant to be a political statement, but I was thinking of this passage when I heard it.
 - a. The president of the US held a news conference earlier this week with this message: The American economy is strong, the financial institutions are stable, and we have no need to be concerned.
 - b. I must confess that the thought going through my head was , “I sure hope there’s a confession booth just outside the conference room, because there isn’t an American in sight that has any evidence that such a statement is true.
 - c. Gas prices are soaring, food is increasing in cost, there are runs on banks, the stock market has lost 22% of its value. I could go on, but you get the point.
 - d. Statements are of little value if there are no actions – no evidence – to prove the statements.
 6. If we say that we have faith, do our actions verify and document our faith? It is a critical question.
- D. **(Slide #16) Truth #3:** Faith without works is dead.

1. Three times James makes similar statements:
 - a. **Verse 17** – *“faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”*
 - b. **Verse 20** – *“faith without deeds is useless.”*
 - c. Verse 26 – *“faith without deeds is dead.”*
2. As illustrations James calls upon Abraham and Rahab.
 - a. It was, according to James, Abrahams actions that proved his faith making possible to covenant with God.
 - b. It was Rahab’s actions, when she hid God’s spies, that proved her faith that resulted in her righteousness.
 - c. In both cases faith was the driving force, but it was their actions that proved their faith to be alive.
3. For James, a life of faith without actions is like a body with no spirit in it.
4. If we say that we have faith, but the accompanying deeds do not demonstrate and document that faith, then in fact our faith has no life; faith is absent.

IV. (Slide #17) THE CALL.

- A. James words are wonderfully refreshing, even while they are confrontational.
 1. They are practical in nature.
 2. They make sense.
 3. They help the believer understand what it means to be complete in Christ.
- B. Found in these words is a call. The call is to a time of inspection.
- C. (Slide #18) I would leave you with some questions:
 1. Do you truly know whom you believe in and have placed your faith and how such a belief should define your life?
 2. If Jesus is your Savior, can you say that your life demonstrates your love for Him, or are there inconsistencies between what you say you believe and how you live.
 3. Are there some actions/deeds/works in your life that God’s Holy Spirit may be speaking to you about right now that need to be surrendered to God so that your faith will better match your lifestyle.
- D. James challenge is to make faith – the essence of what we believe to be true – match or works. His challenge is not only appropriate and contemporary, it’s needed.
- E. Paul declares that in the last days there will be people who “[have] a form of godliness, but [deny] it’s power.”
 1. The temptation is to be Christians in form only.
 2. The temptation is to be a people of faith statements but not faith actions.
 3. Let’s resist that temptation and let our godliness be fully empowered by God to live out our faith as a demonstration of what we truly believe.