

“Functioning Faith!”

I. **INTRO:**

A. Rick & Belize Team share:

B. James has already warned against *empty religion* which is **impure** (1:26,27); Here he warns against an *inactive faith* which is **impotent!** (Stibbs)

C. *Faith is like calories: you can't see them, but you can always see their results!* (Swindoll)

D. **Martin Luther** labeled James a “*right strawy epistle*”, meaning that he felt it lacked solid, biblical doctrine.

1. Luther's battle cry during the reformation was “*Justification by faith alone!*” *Sola Fide*

2. **Read** Rom.4:4,5

E. Important differences:

1. **Emphasis** - **Paul** stresses the **root** of salvation (*faith in Christ + nothing*); **James** stresses the **fruit** after salvation.

2. **Perspective** - **Paul** looks at life from **God's** perspective; **James** looks at life from a **human** perspective.

a) **Paul** is sitting **in the den** staring at the fire in the fireplace; **James** is up **on the roof** eyeing the smoke coming out of the chimney. [*can't see the fireplace only its results*]

b) **To James**, the world should be able to tell that a **faith burns in our hearts** by the **works** they see **coming out of our lives**.

3. **Griffith Thomas reconciled them this way:** It has been well said that St. Paul & St. James are not soldiers of different armies fighting against each other, but soldiers of the same army fighting back to back against the enemies coming from opposite directions.

F. So, James & Paul do not **contradict** each other; they **compliment** each other.

1. **We are justified before God by faith; but we are justified before men by works.**

a) **Because God** can see our **faith**, **but men** can see only our **works!**

2. **Paul** was explaining how one **gains entrance** into salvation; **James** is examining how one **gives evidence** of it. (Swindoll)

G. James contrasts having only **Head Faith**(14-20) **vs.** **Head, Heart, Hand Faith**(21-26).

II. **FUNCTIONING FAITH!**

A. (14) 2 rhetorical questions:

1. **Q:** Can someone have **genuine faith** but not have **works** in their life?
 - a) What good is it to have a **drivers license** if you don't drive? Answer? **None!**
 - b) A **workless** faith is a **worthless** faith!
2. **Q:** Can *that sort of* faith save him *from condemnation*? Answer. **No!**

B. *Empty faith* is words w/o action, profession w/o performance!

1. 1Jn.3:17,18 **But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love(only) in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.**
2. The reformers said it this way, "*we are justified by faith alone, but not by the faith which is alone.*"

C. **4 FACTS OF FUNCTIONING FAITH!** (14-20)

D. [1st] It's not *Indifferent* but **Involved!** (15,16)

E. We've all received empty platitudes instead of real help. "*Have faith!*" "*Keep a stiff upper lip*" even "*I'll pray for you bro!*" (if they don't mean it)

F. True saving faith is seen in **activity**.

1. **Faith** isn't something you only **talk about**; it is something that *motivates your life*, so that you *think of* others & *serve* them. (www)
2. Vs.15,16 tell us it's a faith that goes beyond words & reaches out to the needy.
 - a) Some have said, *The first reformation was about creeds; the new one will be about deeds.*
 - (1) Christian doctrine is settled. No reformation is needed there.
 - (2) What needs **reforming** now are Christian actions. Learning how to be more the hands & feet of Christ in the world & less a mouth.
 - (a) (i.e.) Assist the poor, Care for the sick, Educate the next generation.
 - (b) **Social gospel?** No, a Jesus Gospel!
3. If its a faith that **fails** to produce good deeds...it is **dead & useless!**
4. If you don't **live** it, you don't **believe** it.

G. Listen to vs.16 from *the Mess Bible* *For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup - where does that get you?*

H. [2nd] **It's not *Independent* but In Partnership!** (17)

I. Like the song "*Love & Marriage*"...(last stanza)

1. Love and marriage, love and marriage
Go together like the horse and carriage (ends with...)
You can't have one without the other!
2. Faith & works go together, they are in partnership.
 - a) Like the Boatman that had painted *Faith* on one oar, & *Works* on the other.
Then when people would ask why, he would pull one in, & paddle in a circle.
If you do not have the use of both oars, you make *no progress* as a Christian.

J. [3rd] **It's not *Invisible* but On Display!** (18)

K. It's faith **on display**, or **on exhibit!** (that's what *Show* means in Gk.)

L. Meet James 2 imaginary friends. [He creates an imaginary conversation between 2 people]

1. First friend: "Do your best to show me your faith w/o using works, & I'll show you by my works." We'll see which one has the real deal!
2. Some might argue, however, "Look, there are all kinds of Christians. Some have the gift of works, others are quiet, never displaying their faith."
 - a) But that's like saying some people have *the gift of breathing* & others don't!
 - b) James whole point...*If it doesn't show...you don't have it!*

M. [4th] **It's not *Intellectual* but From The Heart!** (19)

1. Second Friend: This person's defense against *not having any works* is to **hide behind** an **impressive knowledge** of God's Word.
 - a) (i.e.) "My theology is impeccable; I believe God is One, just like it says in Deuteronomy 6:4." "Wonderful", James says, "join hands w/the demons!"¹
2. Demons have their *religious facts* straight, **but** they're still demons.
3. There is **1 distinction** though...the demonic tribes tremble at the thought of God (**tremble/shudder** = a rough, uneven surface; goose bumps!)
4. The **dead faith** of the *religious intellectual* doesn't produce even that much of a reaction.

N. If you take away the element of **application**, you're left only with **mere** intellectual assent

O. Do you still think it's enough just to **believe** that there is one God?

1. Faith **w/o activity** is just like the demons...it's empty & barren devil faith!

P. Q: How profitable is my faith by the **test** of James' illustration? (Let's lay our works on the table)

Q. Q: How does my faith **differ** from that of the demons?

¹ Charles Swindoll: James; pg.86.

- R. **HEAD, HEART, HAND FAITH!** (21-26)
- S. James now illustrates his argument by reference to 2 very different/opposite people & their *Head, Heart, Hand Faith*. And that their works proved their faith!
1. **Abraham** was the Father of the Jews; **Rahab** was a pagan prostitute.
 2. **Abraham** was moral, admired, a Jewish patriarch; **Rahab** was a harlot, looked on w/disdain, considered insignificant.
 - a) Yet both evidenced the same kind of faith.
- T. (21-24) **Abraham** was *saved by faith* (Gen.15:6), **but** he *proved that faith* by obeying God & offering his son (Gen.22).
- U. (25) **Rahab** was *saved by trusting God* (Heb.11:31), **but** she showed the *reality of her faith* by protecting the spies **or** *lending aid to the Israelite army* (Josh.2; 6:17-27).
- V. (26) **Closing principle is simple: when there's separation there is death.**
1. It's true **physically** when the **soul** separates from the **body**; and it's true **spiritually** when **faith** is separated from **works**.
 2. **W/o works, faith is nothing but a corpse, void of vitality & useless to everybody but the undertaker.**
- W. *Faith, like calories: cannot be seen, but James says you can always see its results!*
1. **Q: What results do you see in your life?**
 - a) **Genuine faith is Involved...is yours? Genuine faith is Partnership...is yours? Genuine faith is Displayed...is yours? Genuine faith is from the Heart...is yours?**
 2. **I called it Functioning Faith...what would you call it? Active Faith; Intentional; Authentic; Real; Genuine; Expressive; Demonstrative; Gushing; Friendly; Affectionate Faith?**
- X. **I think Luther figured it out later - Call the one a public justification, the other an inward justification, in this sense that the public justification is a fruit, a result, a proof of the justification in the heart. Accordingly, man is not justified by it before God, but must previously be justified before Him. In the same way, the fruits of the tree proclaim the obvious goodness of the tree, which follows and proves its inner, natural goodness. This is what James means in his epistle when he says: "Faith without works is dead." The fact that works do not follow is a certain sign that there is not faith, but only a dead thought and dream, which people falsely call faith.**

Birch Tree in my front yard lost all its leaves one fall like it's supposed to. But, the next spring there was no bud, no blossom. I let it go a whole year. But, how many years before I call it dead?