

The Type of Religion You Should Lose / James 2:14-26 / The Book of James #5

So I say to you: enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and wide is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But narrow is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. For it is only by their fruit that you will recognize my disciples. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit. But every bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Have you ever met those individuals in life that forgot to get the memo that as decades pass, so does fashion sense? Consequently, they operate under the assumption that what passed as a sharp dressed man in 1982 will equally pass as a sharp dressed man in 2022? I know one in this room today but I'm going to practice taming my tongue by not mentioning his name. He always has the same haircut that he's had for the better part of 30 years: one that never has a hair out of, nor in, place. No matter the occasion, you can be sure that underneath both pant legs of whatever he's wearing – whether denim jeans, cotton dockers or polyester slacks, he's going to be sporting not just white socks, but those beautiful white socks with the three circles around them at the top in oddest color schemes that you've ever seen in your life. You can also be sure he is going to wear the same brown shoes or brown boots with the same black belt no matter the occasion. I know for a fact that this ole boy, whose name I can't mention, thinks the women in his household have conspired against him when it comes to his wardrobe. And it's a conspiracy that he's recently learned has gone on for years and years. You see, a recent forensic examination of his wardrobe that both of his Member's Only Jackets that the ladies of the house have pleaded for him to lose for the better part of three years are now missing. The three pairs of Jordache jeans this poor persecuted Ralph Lauren Impersonator has held onto for almost half a century have suddenly found their way to car washing bin. To matters worse, half of the white socks with three circles have been replaced with completely solid black or blue dress socks. But the worst of all is this: the dress pants he wanted to throw away but was talked off the ledge by the females in the house, were spotted in his closet on actual wood hangers with pleats in them and a spray can of starch nearby! I ask you to pray for that Tommy Hilfiger Design School Drop Out who is in this room today, though I can't mention his name. Church, I want to tell you very simple this morning that the most famous passage in the Book of James is the one we are going to swim in today. And it's the most famous for a reason: he contrasts the type of religion we should lose with the type of religion keep. It's a contrast of religion that is dead versus religion that is alive and well and will never perish, spoil, nor fade. Quite simply, religion that is dead is faith without the actions to demonstrate that it is real in the first place. And religion that is alive and well is exactly the opposite: it's faith demonstrated by fruitful deeds. Turn with me to James 2:14-25 and as we look at what Jesus' Brother says to us about religion we should lose versus religion we should keep.

¹⁴ *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?* ¹⁵ *Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.* ¹⁶ *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?* ¹⁷ *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* ¹⁸ *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.* ¹⁹ *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.* ²⁰ *You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?* ²¹ *Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?* ²² *You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.* ²³ *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.* ²⁴ *You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.* ²⁵ *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?* ²⁶ *As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

The Type of Religion We Should Lose (Faith that's Dead):

1. Always Heard. Never Demonstrated (17-18)

- **The Florida Skunk Ape:** (1) Drive from Vero to Venice, Fl with folks who have lived in Florida their whole lives, they get really quiet heading on 70 West between Lake Whales and Arcada; (2) Not only do they get quiet, but they look out their window frequently, particularly at night; (3) Why? That's Florida Skunk Ape territory. (4) And the Lord better be with you if you break down on that stretch of road. (5) Because according to legend, the Florida Skunk Ape is called a "skunk" because of the pungent odor he developed from living among the alligators and other creatures. (6) So if you smell a skunk while changing your tire, be careful. It's probably not a skunk, it's the Florida Skunk Ape the natives tell you about even though they haven't seen him.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Faith without works is equivalent to words without deeds. Both are useless.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: The Relationship Between Faith and Works** – (1) The phrase "what good is it?" occurs twice in these verses in the form two rhetorical questions about faith without works, both of which assume the answer "no." (2) Faith is "assurance of things hoped for and conviction of these not yet seen. (3) Works are a person's actions and deeds. (4) The issue James deals with is someone who says that "faith is the substance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen" without demonstrating they really believe that with their actions.
- **Major Implications:** (1) Many profess to be Christians, but their lives and priorities indicate evidence directly opposed to their profession. So, therefore, according to James, they are not Christians. (2) There is no such thing as a carnal Christian. The label *Carnal Christian* comes from this problem in Christian culture related to making a "decision for Jesus." It's the idea that you can make some decision for Jesus/walk some aisle/pray some prayer and still live unrepentantly like the devil of hell. That's faith without evidence of repentance (works)...which is no faith at all. Unrepentant professors/confessors of Jesus are lost.
- **App:** If only we would take Matthew 7:22 as literal as we do John 3:16

2. Demon Inspired. Disobedience Driven (19-20).

- **Consider Yourself Blessed If You Ever Run Across Someone Who Thinks They Are Kings of Unlikely Comparisons:** (1) They take metaphors and similes to a whole different level; (2) The true "kings" of the them can make any object seem interesting; (3) As handy as hip pockets on a hog; (4) Busier than a one-armed paperhanger; (5) As ugly as the south end of a north-bound mule; (6) Funnier than a bubblegum machine in a lockjaw ward; (7) What makes them work is the comparison of unlikely things; (8) James compares disobedient Christians to demons
- **Main Idea of the Point:** There's no difference between Demons and the "Christian" who disobeys what he knows to be true.
- **Textual Emphasis: The Shema of Offense** – (1) The Shema in Jewish culture was something you learned very early and said everyday: "Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord our God. The Lord is one. You shall love the Lord with all your heart, mind and strength. These commands I give you this day are to be on your heart. Impress them on your children. (2) Demons can quote the Shema also. But they willingly disobey it. So James says there is no difference between the soldiers of the devil and the Christian who disobeys what he/she already knows to be true. (3) Then adds that the demon has more reverence in his rebellion than the disobedient Christian. That's why he "trembles."
- **App:** The key to restoring a missing moral compass isn't going to church or even reading the Word. It's reading the Word and trembling enough to fear the consequence should you not do what it says.

The Type of Religion We Should Keep (Faith that's Alive):

1. Always Heard. Always Demonstrated (21-23)

- **Gymnastic Kids on Balance Beams Really Astound Me:** (1) I'm not talking about the ones an inch or two off the ground; (2) I'm talking about the ones 10 feet off the ground; (3) Those kids hardly ever look down. They look straight ahead at their coach; (4) They do cartwheels and handstands. All sorts of things with laser focus in their coaches direction. (5) They believe their coach by looking into his/her eyes and demonstrate their belief through actions, most of which take incredible courage to perform successfully.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Abraham's actions proved that his faith was really genuine.

- **Textual Emphasis: Understanding “Righteousness” Through Abraham** (1) It is “conformity to God’s will in thought and deed. (2) Abraham conformed to God’s will in thought when he reasoned in His mind that God could raise Isaac - his only son – from the dead. (3) Abraham conformed to God’s will in deed when he took Isaac to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice him, as God instructed him. (4) Abraham would not have understood this cultural idea of faith without supporting evidence we hear and see in church.
- **App:** What makes faith “alive” isn’t emotion. It isn’t evangelism. It isn’t music. It isn’t Bible Study. It’s obedience to God in thought and deed. Period.

2. Reverence Inspired. Obedience Driven (24-26).

- **Being Cursed with a Name that Occurs Near the End of the Alphabet:** (1) In elementary school, you were considered blessed if your last name started with A,B,C,D. Why? If the teacher hands out rewards, those cats always got first grab of the candy. (2) By the time the “W”s rolled around, there were no more Snickers bars. I was left only two choices: Jawbreakers or Sweet Tarts. (3) My favorite teacher in Elementary School, therefore, was my favorite for one reason: she handed out rewards starting with the end of the alphabet. Glory to God! (4) When Jesus said the last shall be first and the first shall be last, he meant it literally.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** You will see Rahab, one of the “worst” sinners is in the Bible, in heaven because she feared the Lord (demonstrating her faith) and did what he said.
- **Textual Emphasis: The Rahab Insult:** (1) Rahab was a Gentile and she was a prostitute. (2) But she did something the Israelites didn’t: believed God and gave evidence of that faith through her actions. (3) The generation of Israelites who wandered in the wilderness didn’t do that...(4) Rahab, the harlot, did. (5) The last became the first and the first became the last...literally.
- **App:** The world cannot understand how a saint like Abraham and a sinner like Rahab can be included in the Faith Hall of Fame. But God can: Faith that works via evidence of conformity to God’s will in my thoughts (I know what you are asking me to do) and deed (so I will do it).