

Showing the Authenticity of your Faith

June 18, 2017

By John Ulrich, Lead Pastor

James 1:19-27

Let me start today by asking you a question: Have you ever invested in something that wasn't authentic? Have you ever bought something that wasn't quite what it was labeled to be? Ever get something that looked so good in the advertisement or on the box, but then you get it home and it's just not all it's cracked up to be? I have. Does anyone know what this is? It's a Sham-Wow. You may remember that from the info-mercial about 10 years ago. This little jewel is the worst piece of cloth I have ever owned, bar none! It is not absorbent. It makes a terrible shammy. It's like trying to dry your car with a piece of felt. It leaves spots all over your car. The other day, I tried it again just to see if it was really as terrible as I remember, and it was! Kelley asked me how it went. I said "Well let me just say they got the name half-right, and the part they got right is not the Wow! part!" It's a sham! Sham-Wow doesn't live up to its claims. It's not authentic. It's a minor irritation, when we buy something that lacks authenticity. 10 bucks down the drain. Not fun, but not exactly a disaster.

But it's another matter when we lack authenticity in our faith. When people claim to have truth or abilities or even beliefs that they don't really possess that can do a little bit more lasting damage.

I grew up in a church that really emphasized end times Bible prophecy. I remember when I was in Junior High, High School and College, it just seemed like we had an endless stream of guys who would speak at our church or would write books. They would see something in the news and find a connection to some obscure verse in the Bible. They would set a date for the return of Jesus. Kind of like Vince the Sham-Wow guy, they would get everyone really wound up. People would tell their friends that Jesus was returning on a particular day. We would max out our charge cards, because we knew we wouldn't have to pay them off. Just kidding, but everyone would get excited. Then the day would come and nothing would happen. I can remember watching that as a kid and thinking "That's not real. These guys are making claims they can't back up; they are not authentic." To this day, I don't study or teach end-times prophecy, because I've seen so much that is not authentic - so many that claimed truth that wasn't true that I've kind of stopped listening.

I say this, because I think there's a danger that the way I feel about the end times some of the non-Christians around us may feel about our faith. They've seen negative press about Christianity. They've seen hypocrisy exposed in the church: maybe they know Christians that claim knowledge or beliefs or abilities that they don't really have. The result is that they've stopped listening when we talk about our faith, because they are looking for something truly authentic, something that lives up to its billing, something that is truly life-changing. They want an authentic faith.

So how do we how do you and I, as believers in Jesus, really show the authenticity of our faith? We are continuing today in our study of the book of James. In the last couple of weeks, we've seen James talk about trials and how we should respond to those and temptations and how we should respond to those. At the end of last week's passage, James made a very significant statement. He

said that “God brought us forth (or gave birth to us) through the Word of Truth (through the story of Jesus) so that we might be a kind of Firstfruits of his creation.”

Firstfruits was a ceremony in Ancient Israel where they would offer to God the very first part of the fruit or grain harvest. It was a way for them to bring that representation of the harvest to God, so that they could see the quality of the harvest and thank God for his provision. You could see by the Firstfruits the true quality of the harvest.

When James says that we are to be a kind of Firstfruits of God’s new Creation, what he means is that we are to be a picture - we are to be a likeness - we are to be an authentic representation - of what he made his people to be. In other words, we are to show the authenticity of our faith.

So how do we do that? Turn in your Bibles to James 1:19-27. James is going to show us three areas in our life to watch. Three ways that we should show the authenticity of our faith. These aren’t the only ways we do that but three key ways we live out an authentic faith, and to be honest, three ways that often get overlooked. Today James is going to look at:

- * What we do with temptations like anger
- * What we do with God’s word
- * What we do with our religiousness

It’s my prayer that as we look at this passage today we will live out an authentic faith, that we will see genuine transformation in our lives, and that we will be a compelling Church to those around us as they see the kind of life that God is calling them to. Let’s read James 1:19-27:

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it he will be blessed in what he does.

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

- James 1:19-27

James is going to share with us three ways to show the authenticity of our faith:

Get rid of things like anger, that you know to be wrong

James starts this passage with an interesting command look at what he says there:

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

- James 1:19

James commands his readers to be slow to anger. I like the way the Message paraphrases this passage. It says "Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear." James is telling his readers that they should be really slow to anger.

Then he tells them why. The New International Version puts it this way:

for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires

- James 1:30

Now that's a pretty interpretive translation. What James actually says in the Greek is far simpler. It's just "man's anger doesn't work God's righteousness." Now what does that mean? Why is that the reason we should be slow to anger? Well there are a number of ways we could put it together. When you read the New International Version, it kind of sounds like James is just saying "Anger is wrong (not righteous). It's not the lifestyle that God wants for his people." It could mean that, but I think James is actually saying something far more thought-provoking than just that anger is wrong.

Let me put the parts together for you and show you what I mean. The Greek word for anger is the word "orge." Orge doesn't refer to a sudden flying off the handle or really so much to the emotion of anger. Rather, orge is a slow, building anger that usually results in action. It's a word that originally referred to sap rising up in trees in the spring. It's the word that is used to describe God's wrath in the Bible. It is slow building, but it often results in a powerful action. In the Bible, the word orge is sometimes translated "punishment" or "vengeance." So that's orge or anger.

Likewise, the word "righteousness" doesn't just refer to being innocent. It relates to doing what is right in a given situation or even to working or administrating justice. Notice here that James doesn't say orge isn't righteous. What he says is that it doesn't work, it doesn't cause, it doesn't bring about righteousness.

Now when you put that all together what you get is this. It's not just that James is saying anger isn't righteous. What he's saying is far more profound. He's saying the vengeance (the outworking of anger) of man does not bring about the justice (the rightness the equity) of God. He's saying this: "Man's vengeance doesn't bring about God's justice"

It makes perfect sense that James would say this to his readers, because from a human standpoint they would have more than enough cause to be angry and to take vengeance. They had every reason to be angry. James has already talked to them about persevering in trials. He's already

addressed his letter to the “12 tribes scattered abroad (by persecution).” If we keep reading, James is going to talk about the rich mistreating his readers and dragging them to court and even murdering them. He’s going to talk about the damage that occurs when people mistreat one another out of envy. He’s going to tell his readers to be patient, because the judge is at the door. They were experiencing mistreatment, so it makes perfect sense that James would remind them that man’s vengeance doesn’t bring about God’s justice.

Listen, what James is saying here is true. It’s true that man’s vengeance doesn’t bring about God’s justice (true justice). It’s hard to see when you are angry, because when you’re angry it feels like the ONLY thing this is about is justice. I mean that’s what you’re itching to do is bring about justice. But man’s anger doesn’t bring about God’s justice. It doesn’t bring about God’s justice, because we never have all the facts in a situation. So we don’t know what justice really is.

I remember several years ago, I attended the symphony with Kelley. During the program, I noticed that there was someone on our row snoring. It got quite loud. Once you notice that kind of thing, it drives you crazy! I waited for the intermission, and I was going to kind of let them have it. You know “would you mind staying awake, because that’s very rude!” Then the lights came on, and I turned, and I found out he was severely disabled and that’s just the way he breathed. I thought I knew what justice was, but I didn’t have the facts. We never have all the facts.

There’s another reason that man’s vengeance doesn’t bring about God’s justice, and it’s this: No two people measure pain the same. Vengeance will never bring about justice, because the two parties are never going to measure the pain of the situation the same. What seems like a big deal to the victim usually seems like a much smaller deal to the perpetrator. So you’re never going to agree on what justice is.

Let me give you an example: Some of you have parents that were less than loving. Maybe parents who spoke very unkind maybe abusive words to you. Now if I were to ask you to think back on some of those words and tell me how much your parents owe you for them - how much they should really pay if we really want to make things just - you would take into account the words they spoke in that moment, you would take into account the emotional pain it caused you that day and the next and the next, because every time you remember that it re-wounds you. You would take into account how that changed the way you saw yourself how that made you decide that you were less than. You would take into account how that changed your life and your decisions for the worse. Then you would add it all up and say “here’s the bill you owe me this much.”

Now, if I were to ask them about the incident and they were being honest they would probably say “I had a bad day I aimed some of my other frustration at my child, they were being difficult I took it out on them and I mis-spoke.” I wasn’t trying to wreck anyone’s self-image or ruin anyone’s life. I just said words I should not have said. I owe this much.”

Which is it? This much or this much? You won’t agree, right? So if you try to take vengeance and bring about justice and you make them pay this much which is fair by your reckoning. Let me ask you a question: How is it going to seem to them? Like you way, way, way over-did it. It’s going to

seem un-just. They are going to pay you back plus change just to make sure you learn your lesson and on and on it's going to go.

That's exactly how hatred and estrangement and wars get started. That's why Jesus said "Love your enemies, and pray for those who mistreat you." That's why Paul said "never avenge yourselves." That's why James says "be slow to anger." Man's anger doesn't bring about God's justice. It just doesn't.

So knowing that, James has a final piece of instruction about anger:

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

- James 1:21

His instruction is this: Get rid of it. Don't act on it. Don't nurture it. Don't justify it. Don't tell yourself "I should be this angry, but I'm just going to be this angry." Don't surround yourself with people that are angry for your sake. Don't make excuses. Just get rid of it. He calls it "moral filth" and "evil" here. He does that to shock us, because he knows how easy it is to justify our anger. So he says "get rid of it."

James could say that about anything that we know to be wrong. He's just talking about anger here, because he knows that is their main temptation at this moment because of their circumstances. To us in our culture, James might say "get rid of lust or get rid of pride or get rid of materialism." Or he might say "get rid of anger," because it's a temptation we all face. James is saying "if you want a firstfruits - a representative of what God made his people to be, then show the authenticity of your faith by getting rid of things you know to be wrong."

Get rid of things like anger that you know to be wrong. That's the first thing James says.

Practice the Word you claim to believe

Look at what James says:

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept (or “receive”) the word planted in you, which can save you.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it he will be blessed in what he does.

- James 1:21-25

James says here that his readers should humbly accept or receive the Word of God. But there's a danger, and it's a danger we're all prone to. There is a danger that James' readers will think that when he says “receive the word” he just means ‘listen to it’. Look what James says in verse 22: Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Literally he says “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

Receiving the word is not just hearing it but doing it. Why? Because if you don't do it, you don't really believe it's true. If I were to tell John Maiden “there's wet paint on that chair” and John receives what I've said, will he sit on the chair? If John verbally agrees with me that there is wet paint on the chair and then still sits on it, did he receive what I said? If John tells other people “it's wet” and sits on it, did he receive what I said? NO. To receive the word means to hear it and do it.

Now look at what James says at the end of verse 22: “Don't merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves.” James says that listening to the word - being someone that is a hearer of the Word and not a doer - is self-deception. It is deceiving yourself, misleading yourself. One translation says “deluding yourselves.” Hmm...so how does being a hearer-only deceive us? James gives us an illustration:

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like

- James 1:23-24

How does being a hearer-only deceive us? Here's how: It makes us feel like we've addressed the problem, when we really haven't. James gives us an illustration: He says hearing without doing is like getting up and looking in the mirror and noting everything that needs attention. Going “Wow! My hair looks like an explosion! I have egg on my face, and I need to button the little buttons on my shirt. Wow!” And then walking away and doing nothing. It's ridiculous!

When I used to teach this passage at the Theological College, I would kind of act it out. I would come to class a big mess - hair messed up, dirt on my face, my shirt buttoned wrong, and toilet paper hanging out of my shoe. I would walk in and just start class that way. The students were

very polite, but eventually one of the students would always raise their hand and say “Mr. Ulrich, have you looked in the mirror?” I would say “I sure did,” and we would look at this passage. We would have a good laugh, because we know it’s silly to look in the mirror and do nothing about what we see.

We would never come to church on a Sunday looking like that would we? But how many of us come here, hear the word of God taught, see something we need to change in our life and go right on like we were before? It’s easy to tell ourselves we feel good, because we came to church. We got our bit of teaching. We heard the word. We greet one another and pat one another on the back

But James says that’s not good enough! You still have egg on your face! You have to practice the Word you claim to believe! As one of my Seminary Professors used to say: “God doesn’t want smarter sinners.”

We have to receive the word and receiving the word means putting it into practice. Let me just say that’s exactly why our Small Groups meet to discuss the sermon and to look at the passage together. They meet to figure out where this passage plugs into our everyday lives. How do we put hands and feet on this sermon? How do we be doers of the word? If you’re not in a Small Group, let me urge you to talk to Kelley or myself we’ll get you plugged in!

Because here’s the thing: James promises a special blessing to those who put the word into practice. Look at what James says:

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it he will be blessed in what he does.

- James 1:25

There’s a special blessing for those who do the Word. This is the church we want to be. We want to be a church that truly submits to God’s Word, a church that obeys it, and a Church with a sense of immediacy and urgency about doing what God shows us to do in his Word week by week.

* Do you want to be a powerful church? Be doers of the Word.

* Do you want to be a church where the Holy Spirit has free reign and moves among us a church where even non-Christians sense God’s presence in this place? Be doers of the Word.

* Do you want to be a compelling church? An authentic church? A church where our neighbors see something they want? Do the Word.

* Do you want to be a church with a happy delighted Pastor? Do the word.

I like it when someone tells me they enjoyed the sermon. But I love it - I mean my heart does back flips - when someone tells me they are putting the sermon into practice. That’s the church we want to be. We’re becoming that! I’m going to tell you in a minute about something that happened Friday that showed me that we are doing the word and reminded me how important that really is. We want to be doers and not hearers only.

Remember this is the huddle. The game's out there. You need the huddle to play the game right. But if you never play the game, the huddle doesn't do you any good!

So how do we show ourselves to be authentic in our faith?

(1) Put away things (like anger) that you know are wrong

(2) Practice the word you claim to believe.

Now James closes with one more thought:

Don't talk about the purity of your religion: Show it.

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

- James 1:26-27

Don't tell everyone how pure your religion is. Show it. It used to always make me nervous when I was on the construction job and someone would start talking to me about how religious they were, because most of the other guys on the job weren't Christians and half the time. The guys that were doing a very good job of talking about how religious they were were doing a very bad job of working. You just wanted to say "Please keep Jesus out of this for now and do your job." James here says "don't just talk about it show the purity of your religion." He gives us three categories for that:

1. He says "bridle your tongue," because it's the hardest thing to bridle. He'll talk more about that in chapter 3.
2. He says "keep yourself unstained from the world." That shows that we aren't hypocritical.
3. Finally, he says "true religion is to visit orphans and widows in their distress."

I used to always wonder "Why is helping orphans and widows the test of true religion? Why are they the ones who show that your religion is pure?" Simple: Because they can't help you back. They are powerless to reward you for your good deeds. Helping people who cannot help you back shows that you really believe in God - that you really believe. As the book of Hebrews says "that God exists and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him." Helping the powerless - those who can't or even won't help you back - shows the authenticity of your faith.

If you want to know where the modern equivalent of this passage - where the powerless can be found - you don't have to go far. They meet right here in this school every day. They're the single parent families - the moms who work hard and then come home every night to run a household. They're the Dads who shake my hand earnestly when we serve here but don't respond verbally, because they don't speak enough English yet. They're Daniel - the little guy I proctored for an EOG exam - that needed an Arabic-English dictionary to take his test. They are a little guy we call "Tenacious D" who always seems to be in the Principal's office here, because he needs a male presence to show him what a Father is really like.

These are the people who can't pay us back. They are part of the community God has called us to serve. If I could be direct, some of you need to discover the joy of showing the authenticity of your faith by serving them. You say "why would I want to proctor an EOG exam? That's boring. There's absolutely nothing in it for me." Exactly. That's how we show the authenticity of our faith. We have to show the authenticity of our faith.

On Friday, Principal Gary Major had his first “All-Pro Dads” event.” This is a program where Principal Major is trying to involve men and turn the hearts of Fathers toward their children and visa versa. He had a giant crowd! He expected 75 then. He had 140 sign up. By the time we were done, we had all of this room and most of the cafeteria filled up: 300 dads and kids.

While we were helping with that, I saw a couple of things that relate to this passage and to showing an authentic faith. First, Kelley saw tons of Dad and kids walking, and smiling, and laughing together as they came to share breakfast and to see what All-Pro Dads was about. But then Kelley also saw the kids getting off the bus who didn’t have a Dad with them or maybe didn’t have a dad at all and couldn’t attend. Her heart went out to them. She wondered how we can serve those little guys who can’t help us back.

Then secondly while I was cleaning up, one of the teachers came to me and called me aside and said “can I have a word with you?” This is literally what she said to me. She said “I am a Christian and I know that when you’re serving here you can’t talk a lot about Jesus.” But I want you to know that it’s obvious to everybody that your church is the hands and feet of Jesus.” The way your people serve - the heart that they show - I’ve never seen anything like it. You need to know that it’s not un-noticed. The faculty talks about your church. Thank you for representing Jesus to us in this way.”

That’s what we’re here to do. We’re here to show the authenticity of our faith and the authenticity of the gospel:

- * By getting rid of the things we know to be wrong
- * By doing something about the things we learn from God’s Word
- * By helping those who can’t help us back

If we do those things - acting out our faith in the gospel - we will be representative of what God made his people to be.