



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau  
November 20, 2016

**"The Real Deal" (Real Faith for Real People Series)**  
**The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun**

**J**ames 1:26 If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

*James 1:27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*

What does it mean to be religious as opposed to being faithful? That's what our Bible passage is all about today. Now when James, the half brother of Jesus, writes about being religious, he is not talking about having just a supernatural experience with something. So whether you are Buddhist, Mormon, or New Age, you can be religious.

No, when James talks about being religious, he is focusing on what it means to be a true and faithful follower of Jesus. But it goes even further. In following Jesus, we need to know that God is not into rituals for the sake of rituals. He is not into a religion that is solely about rules and regulations. He is into relationships.

In fact, in the Bible Jesus had a hard time with religious people, like the Pharisees who were so much into rules that the rules became a burden for people. It became a faith that did not build people up or bring them closer to God. No, it was more like a long list of don't do this, don't do that. It's a sin to carry something on the Sabbath or to have too much salt in your food.

In the original language of the New Testament, which is Greek, the word for "religiosity" is *threskeia*, which means "outward expression of religion in ritual and liturgy and ceremony." James was saying that if you follow Jesus, it has to be more than just going through the motions of an outward expression of rituals.

I know this sounds weird but Jesus was against religious people who were more into the form of faith rather than a vibrant, relational faith with God that will move them to love other people. Jesus talked of having a friendship with us, not rituals.

Even in the Old Testament days, way before the time of James, God was trying to tell the Jewish people that following Him was not about ceremonies and rituals. In the book of Isaiah, God said this:

*Is. 1:11 "What makes you think I want all your sacrifices?" says the LORD. "I am sick of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle. I get no pleasure from the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.*

*Is. 1:12 When you come to worship me, who asked you to parade through my courts with all your ceremony?*

*Is. 1:13 Stop bringing me your meaningless gifts; the incense of your offerings disgusts me! As for your celebrations of the new moon and the Sabbath and your special days for fasting— they are all sinful and false. I want no more of your pious meetings.*

*Is. 1:14 I hate your new moon celebrations and your annual festivals. They are a burden to me. I cannot stand them!*

*Is. 1:15 When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look. Though you offer many prayers, I will not listen, for your hands are covered with the blood of innocent victims.*

*Is. 1:16 Wash yourselves and be clean! Get your sins out of my sight. Give up your evil ways.*

*Is. 1:17 Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows.*

You hear that and you think, "Oh wow, God really gets angry at religious people who go through them motions." But did you hear that last verse? The true mark of faith in following Jesus is not doing ceremonies and rituals. Others will know that you are truly a follower of Christ if you learn to do good, seek justice, help the oppressed, defend the cause of orphans, and fight for the rights of widows. That sounds so much like our passage today where it ended with:

*James 1:27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*

This is what it means to follow Jesus. It's a matter of the heart. Do we really care for the strangers in the land, for orphans (those with no parents either physically or emotionally) and for the poor (those who are poor either financially or spiritually)?

In the recent presidential election, pundits and newscasters were saying that Christian evangelicals put Donald Trump in the White House. But does the news media even know what an evangelical is? If I were to ask them what evangelical means, would they even know? I think not.

Our denomination is called the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, or ECO, for short. So when someone banter around the words “those Evangelicals,” the meaning of those words are really important to us.

Classically, according to the Barna research group that surveyed Hawaii on its State of Faith, “evangelical” means persons who:

- Have a responsibility to share their faith. (We are evangelistic!)
- Believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth. He’s God!
- Believe the Bible is accurate in all that it teaches. (It’s reliable!)
- Believes in the existence of Satan.
- Believe eternal salvation is gained through grace alone.
- Choose an orthodox definition of God. (God is not some mystic, cosmic energy force. He’s personal.)
- Believe their faith is very important in their daily life.

Notice it has nothing to do with denominations.

In 2011 the Barna Group said that based on that definition, only 4% of the Hawaii’s population are evangelicals, while the average on the mainland is 8%.

Recently evangelical Seminary President Mark Labberton and Seminary President Emeritus Richard Mouw of Fuller Seminary, from which all of our pastors graduated and where our staff directors Jenny and Matt are studying, came out with this statement:

*During the 2016 presidential campaign, the label “evangelical” became an especially blurred category both because of the media and because of some evangelical voices.*

*Over the course of the campaign, the press increasingly referred to evangelicals as politically conservative, and predominantly white Christians.*

*For some evangelicals, abortion and future Supreme Court appointments were of primary concern, placed over and against concerns for women, people of color, Muslims, and LGBT persons.*

*As President and President Emeritus of Fuller Theological Seminary, we lament and reject the disgrace that hateful words and actions by SOME evangelicals have heaped specifically upon people of color, immigrants, women, Muslims, and LGBT persons in our nation, as we uphold the dignity of all persons made in the image of God.*

*We grieve and condemn the racism and fear, rejection and hatred that have been expressed and associated with our Lord.*

*Such realities do not in any way reflect the fruit of God’s Spirit and instead evoke the sorrow of God’s heart and of our own. – President Mark Labberton and President Emeritus Richard Mouw*

So now let’s really look at our Bible passage today. Again let me say it again so it marinates in our minds:

*James 1:26 If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.*

*James 1:27 Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.*

That’s the REAL DEAL when it comes to faith! Look at that passage. There are three things clearly stated by James. If you are religious in the best sense of the word – if you are the REAL DEAL, meaning a true follower of Jesus it means that you control your tongue; you really care for orphans and widows; and you refuse to let the world corrupt you.

### **1) You control your tongue.**

Friends, to be honest, if we say we follow Christ, but we cuss, curse, criticize people on how they look or think, or gossip to make people look bad, then James says, “Your religion is worthless.” He would say it’s fake. You’re a fraud! It is this kind of hypocrisy that Jesus hated. It’s the showy kind of religion that doesn’t help people but only makes YOU look good, or so you think.

When you read the Bible, you’ll find it amazing how Jesus never gets mad at a sinner. Never. He never got mad at an adulterous woman, or a woman who was married five times, or lepers, or a dishonest tax collector named Zacchaeus, or a demonically possessed man. If you are a sinner, Jesus doesn’t get mad at you; He welcomes you!

BUT, He DID GET MAD at religious people who thought they were super spiritual and holier than others. The irony is this: If you think you are super spiritual, then you are not. And if you think you are not super spiritual, then you might be.

Jesus said this about the Pharisees of His time, who were super religious and were really into the laws and rules of religions to make themselves look good on the outside:

*Luke 11:39 “You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy—full of greed and wickedness!*

*Luke 11:40 Fools! Didn’t God make the inside as well as the outside?*

**L**uke 11:41 *So clean the inside by giving gifts to the poor, and you will be clean all over.*

*Luke 11:42 "What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore justice and the love of God. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.*

*Luke 11:43 "What sorrow awaits you Pharisees! For you love to sit in the seats of honor in the synagogues and receive respectful greetings as you walk in the marketplaces.*

*Luke 11:44 Yes, what sorrow awaits you! For you are like hidden graves in a field. People walk over them without knowing the corruption they are stepping on."*

*Luke 11:45 "Teacher," said an expert in religious law, "you have insulted us, too, in what you just said."*

*Luke 11:46 "Yes," said Jesus, "what sorrow also awaits you experts in religious law! For you crush people with unbearable religious demands, and you never lift a finger to ease the burden.*

Yowza! Jesus does NOT like religious people who go through religious motions but their hearts are not fully given to Him.

If you are new to the faith and you're trying to figure out what it means to know Jesus, know that Jesus doesn't like religious people. He doesn't like people who are into legalism, image, or appearance or being holy. He doesn't like people who come up with more and more rules to press down on people without lifting a finger to ease their burdens.

But then the Book of James goes deeper. If you really care about Christ, you would care for the most down-and-out people. It's not about church attendance or how much you study the Bible. It's not just about aviation ground school. It's about actually flying the plane. What might be evidence that you really care for Christ? The answer is in point number two.

## **2) Caring for orphans and widows in their distress.**

The movie *Hotel Rwanda* has an important role in our church history. You might have noticed a poster of that movie near the espresso machine in the west wing – where the atrium is, and where my oval office is, but is actually rectangular.

The poster in the glass case was signed by Paul Rusesabagina, the manager of Hotel Rwanda of which the movie is about. In 1990 a civil war broke out in Rwanda between the Hutus and the Tutsis. With their machetes and machine guns, the Hutus killed more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in just 100 days. That's 800,000! In order to protect the Tutsis who were fleeing from the Hutus, Paul Rusesabagina hid and saved more than 1200 Tutsis in his hotel. Here's a clip from the movie with Don Cheadle as hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina. (A clip from the movie was shown.)

Would we use our business, our homes to save people? It is inconceivable to James that a true follower of Jesus does not have a heart for orphans and widows.

I have great admiration for those who have adopted orphans. My brother-in-law and sister-in-law adopted two kids from China. One was an orphaned baby found under a bridge in Beijing. The other was a baby left in a cement factory in Guangzhou, formerly known as Canton. Desperate parents in China leave their unwanted babies in public places so people might find them.

Today these orphaned but adopted babies are now grown. One is going to Marist College in New York and the other is going to Hawaii Baptist Academy in Honolulu. They have flourished here in the arts and academics. Both have increased opportunities. Both have received Christ in their hearts.

I have encouraged all of you to sponsor a Compassion child, and I hope every attender of this church sponsors one. By being a sponsor you help an orphan, especially those in Africa who have lost both parents because of wars or HIV/AIDS. These orphans need your help, as do widows who need child support.

If you never have sponsored a Compassion International child, please go to the Compassion website, [compassion.com](http://compassion.com), and look at the pictures of kids without sponsors yet. You can choose by gender, age country, and birthday. And please indicate that First Prez referred you.

Jesus says to us that if we truly are followers of Him, we will have a heart for the poor and disadvantaged children. Jesus has sent us not only out into the community but also into the world to help others.

Several years ago a famous televangelist rented space regularly on our campus through Ko'olau Ballrooms. But we had to ask him to leave even though he paid a lot of money to rent our rooms. Why? Because one day we heard him say on the set, "For all you widows out there, if you give ME \$5,000 right now, God will bless you."

I felt he was ripping off widows, so I personally talked to the head of his TV network that sponsored the show. I asked him to please not have him change his message or never use our facilities ever again even though we could make a lot of money off of renting to them.

It was a tough meeting, but I felt the book of James supported me, and Jesus too. In the end, the station pulled their business from us. And in deficit years that rent would be nice, but we got to do what is right. We have got to protect the widows.

## **3) You refuse to let the world corrupt you.**

**H**ow do we know if Jesus is first priority in our hearts? It is when we are trying to follow His values and not the world's. It can be so subtle, you know. We may be using our prayer life just to make sure we are successful, healthy, and happy but not be thinking about other people's well being.

The follower of Jesus wants to accomplish the agenda of Jesus. We should not be using Jesus to get Him to accomplish ours. You might say, "What a bummer! I like my agenda better!" No, the reality is if you follow Jesus' agenda and try to accomplish it, it is far more fulfilling and satisfying.

It means you have to see yourself as His representative in your school or job or neighborhood. You are meant to be a person of light – a reconciler, a negotiator, a voice of reason, an advocate to protect people who are being bullied or unfairly criticized, or to help someone who is hurting because of a broken relationship, a death, a divorce, or an illness.

Accomplish God's agenda and help others. Wherever you live, work, or play, accomplish God's agenda. Don't let the culture corrupt you.

Here is a scene from the movie *The Fighting Temptations* starring Cuba Gooding, a marketing executive who realizes during a business presentation that the world's culture had affected his integrity. He realized his purpose in life was wrong and he was hurting people. (A clip from the movie was shown.)

There is a part of our human nature where we try to do what is right because we think it gets us a lot of points in the world's eyes. But it shouldn't matter what people think. What matters is what Jesus thinks. It always ends up with just two things: your heart and love.

Your heart. Are we doing things for the

right reasons? Are we doing good deeds because it is what God wants us to do? Are we doing things because it will please God? When we do Christian deeds, are we doing it for the right reason? Jesus once said this:

*Matt. 7:21 "Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who ACTUALLY do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.*

*Matt. 7:22 On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.'*

*Matt. 7:23 But I will reply, 'I never knew you.*

How's that for a kicker? You could be casting out demons, prophesying in the name of Jesus, or having miraculous achievements, but if you didn't do it for Jesus and according to God's will, then Jesus will say, "I never knew you." Our resumé may mean squat if we didn't allow Jesus to write it.

And what about love? Again, when we think accomplishments of faith are enough, we are reminded of those words in 1 Corinthians 13:

*1Cor. 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.*

*1Cor. 13:2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.*

*1Cor. 13:3 If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

*1Cor. 13:4-5 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.*

I close with this thought about Hotel Rwanda. I said earlier that it was an important movie in our church history.

Why? Because about 11 years ago, I challenged our church before we moved into Ko'olau to be like Hotel Rwanda. Would this be a place that, though it looks nice like a hotel, would be used as an operating base to go out and save people, like orphans and widows?

One of the FIRST things we did when we bought this place was to put up the mural of children in poverty in our Compassion Hall. It's like our wall of fame that shows the children we honor in Jesus' name. And to this date our church alone has sponsored nearly 1600 children. Well done.

That is NOT to brag, but it is to say, we are at work and we have a lot more work to do. Like in the *Hotel Rwanda* movie, the UN worker says before she drives off, "I have more orphans to save."

Today in our country there are no Hutus killing Tutsis with machetes or machine guns. No, as evangelicals who believe in Satan, we see that the enemy is far worse, worse than murderous Hutus. We believe Satan is alive and His demons are using people to hurt children, adults, widows, single and married people, and we must do all we can to be a spiritual Hotel Rwanda.

We need to take in people to strengthen, comfort, and encourage them and then train them to go out and help more people. That is the mission of First Prez – to love God, love people, and reach the world for Jesus Christ. May that be your mission too. For that's the Real Deal. Amen?

Let's pray. May all generations young and old hear the importance of having a real faith that follows Jesus and helps people in His name. May we truly always be grateful for you And have a true thirst in our hearts for you. Amen.