

BOOK OF JAMES - 2

2: 1-26 Practical Faith

The Challenge of Chapter Two

We must strive to live the Christian life without partiality. If we preferred the rich over the poor, we are operating out of impure motives and are no better than the world. The expression of our faith should be evident to both believers and the world through good works motivated by God's love dwelling in our hearts. The object of the Christian life is to become more like Jesus.

1. Faith's Reaction to Prejudice (1-13)

James was seeing partiality and preferential treatment being demonstrated in his congregation at Jerusalem. The rich were being preferred over the poor and James strongly warns the congregation against this because they were acting no differently than the world. The rich and poor are the same in God's eyes. James also warns that God would quickly judge divisions in the church resulting from a respect of persons.

A. Rebuke Against Prejudice

Jas 2:1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with respect of persons.

My brethren, have (echo: hold) not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with (combined with) respect of persons (prosopolempsais: partiality toward people).

"My brethren" marks the beginning of a new section dealing with partiality of persons (prejudice). Verse 1 deals with the existence of prejudice in the congregation. Verses 2 and 3 give an example of prejudice. Verse 4 gives a condemnation for these actions.

Our faith is free; it is a gift of God (Acts 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9). Faith is given to us from the Lord without respect of persons. Faith is a gift to male and female, black and white, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile.

The Lord is also called the "Lord of glory." This is a reference to the cloud of glory from the Old Testament that accompanied the children of Israel through the wilderness. It was their protection by day and warmth by night. It led them through the wilderness, and it too was given without partiality. All were protected, warmed, and led by it, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile.

God was consistently against partiality in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:17, 2 Chronicles 19:7, Job 31:13-15, 34:19).

In the New Testament, God's attitude does not change (Acts 10:34, 15:9, Romans 2:11-12, 10:12, Ephesians 6:8-9, Colossians 3:24, 1 Peter 1:17). He continually comes to the defense of the poor, the widows and the orphans. This too, becomes one of James's contentions over his congregation (1:27), and he later calls it sin (2:9). Believers are warned not to have respect of persons (Proverbs 24:23, 28:21; 1 Timothy 5:21). The faith that God has given us should not be combined with respect of persons. If the object of our lives is to be like Jesus Himself (Ephesians 5:1), we cannot be partial toward each other with the gift with which God has blessed us. This does not mean we cannot give respect to those to whom it is due (1 Peter 2:17). God Himself gives respect to those believers who have accomplished great things with their faith (Hebrews 11) because they become examples and an encouragement for others to also achieve great things for God.

Jas 2:2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

For if there come unto your assembly (sunagoge: synagogue) a man with a gold ring (chrusodaktulios: gold fingered) in goodly (lampra: splendid, Luke 23:11) apparel and there come also a poor man in vile (rupara: dirty and shabby) raiment;

The synagogue was the place where the church of Jerusalem met. It would be as much of a "church" as those meeting in homes in Ephesus, Rome, or Corinth. During the service, a man would walk in with splendid clothing and "gold fingered." This refers to more than just a gold ring; it represents many gold rings on the man's hand. There is no indication that the man is a believer and it is likely that he was not. Churches were always open for unbelievers to attend (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

Later, during the same service another man (probably an unbeliever) walks into the service wearing dirty and shabby clothing. These two men represented both economic and social differences. It is probable that the rich man was influential in the city in business and politics. The poor man would not have access to those in high places of influence. If the rich man were born again, he would probably give large sums of money in tithes to the church and influence other wealthy people to attend the church. As a result the church would not only have money, they would also be known by those in the community.

Jas 2:3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

This verse is representing the reaction of the congregation, through the usher, for the two different men coming into the church. Apparently the room was crowded and seating was at a premium. When the rich man entered, a place was found for him regardless of the number of

people who had to move for him to have a seat. Those near the front of the church were apparently moved to give the rich man a place where he could see and hear well.

When the poor man entered, no attempt was made to find him a seat. First, he is told that he can stand. He is told that if he wants to sit, he can sit on the floor. He was still able to see the platform, but it would be at the level of everyone's footstools.

This verse does not negate honoring those to whom honor is due. When a notable minister or public official visits the congregation, it is not wrong to place them in a seat of honor. But to sit someone in a place of honor simply because of riches, power, or fame is wrong. The motive for honoring must be examined. It should not be done because it will somehow benefit the church; rather, it could be for an individual's honorably-obtained accomplishments.

Jas 2:4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

Are ye not then partial in (diekrithete: making distinctions among) yourselves

The Greek word diekrithete here was also used for the word "doubt" in 1:6. It is a variance between two opinions within the mind of the believer. They were double minded (1:8). These people had accepted the truth of God's Word on social distinction, but when confronted with a real-life situation in church, they did not practice it. Being doers of the Word must also occur in church.

. . . and are become judges of (with) evil thoughts?

The people in James's church had become partial judges. They based their judgments and sentencing on external dress and social class. This would not even be allowed in a courtroom of the world. Only crooked judges would receive bribes from rich defendants. Only crooked judges would sentence the poor when they could not afford bribe money. The church of God had become no different than an unjust courtroom.

B. The Results of Prejudice

Jas 2:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

The book of James is a constant message from the pastor for the congregation to quit acting like the world. They are again addressed as "beloved brethren" (1:16, 19), a familiar quote of James (Acts 15:13). They are commanded to think and look at life from the divine viewpoint and see the poor and rich as God sees them. God chose the poor man before he ever set foot in the congregation. God chose him before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), before he ever had money or did not have money. He was chosen on the merits of the work of Jesus, not his

own works or social position. This does not mean every poor person will be saved, but it means that their poverty will not stand in the way of God giving them eternal life. We will always have the poor with us (Matthew 26:11).

God sees the rich in the same manner. They cannot be saved more easily because they have money. God offers them salvation by the same method He offers to the poor, the exercise of their faith in Jesus Christ. God never tires of giving eternal life to the poor (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). They have great opportunities to be “rich in faith.” God also gives them a way to become prosperous in this life (3 John 2) and to see their needs met (Philippians 4:19). God desires as much to heal their bodies (5:14-15) and prosper them as He does to save them. They are rich in the “kingdom,” not only on earth but also in heaven.

A poor Christian is richer than a wealthy sinner. He possesses the riches of heaven before he ever gets there. The more a believer knows the Word and learns to love the Lord (1 John 4:7-8), the richer he becomes in God’s kingdom. Knowledge will bring great rewards in life and even more in eternity. They are “heirs” because they are joined (Romans 8:17) to the “heir of all things”— Jesus Himself (Hebrews 1:2).

The actions of James’s church toward the rich and poor have shown they are no better than the world. The rich man now knows his power and position can buy him a seat in the church just as they can in the world. The poor man now knows Christians treat him just as the world does.

Why should he want to accept Jesus as his Lord if he is shown the same prejudice from those who profess to have eternal life?

Jas 2:6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

The rich were using the courts to oppress the people of Jerusalem. Many in the congregation at Jerusalem were part of that crowd who had been taken to court by the rich and powerful. Some of the rich of the city had built their riches through oppression and hostility toward others. Now one of those rich men comes through the door of the church, and the people stumble to find him a seat of prominence!

Jas 2:7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

Do not they blaspheme (slander) that worthy name by the which ye are called?

The rich not only oppress and drag the people of the city before the judges, they also had religious hatred toward anyone who calls on the name of Jesus. Many of the rich were arrogant and did not like to hear of those who trusted in the Lord. To trust in the Lord sounded weak to them because they had worked hard to gain their riches. These were self-made men whose riches were

controlling them instead of them controlling the riches. Such was the story of the rich young ruler who was controlled by money and kept away from eternal life (Mark 10:24). Rich young rulers were scattered throughout the city of Jerusalem in the days of the early church.

Jas 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love (agapa) thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well:

This “royal law” is quoted from Leviticus 19:18. It was the law Jesus used for the rich young ruler to prove that he did not love his neighbor as himself (Matthew 19: 19-22). If a person can keep this law, he can keep all of the others. It is impossible for this law to be kept by a person’s will or by the energy of the flesh. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life to manifest divine love (Romans 5:5). This could not be fulfilled until the New Testament when the Holy Spirit was given. Divine love is to be the motivation behind all Christian service (John 13: 34-35, 1 Corinthians 13). If Christians love their neighbors -- whether sinners or saints -- as they do themselves, they will seek the same good for them as they do for themselves. They will want their neighbors to have eternal life, be healed, and prosper just as they have.

Jas 2:9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

But if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of (convicted by) the law as transgressors.

Respect of persons is a violation of any or all of the commandments in the Word of God. The believers in the church at Jerusalem were sinning and James was going to bring it to their attention. Not only was James telling them they were sinning, the law stood over them as a condemnation of their attitudes.

Jas 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

Here again is an illustration of the rich young ruler. He was guilty of the whole law because he could not keep the royal law. He told Jesus “... all these things have I kept from my youth up” (Matthew 19:20). He was puffed up in pride as so many rich are, but the Word broke through. It showed he was guilty of all instead of keeping all. The congregation at Jerusalem was now guilty of the whole law because of their failure to keep partiality out of the church.

Jas 2:11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill (murder: cf Matthew 19:18), thou art become (ginomai) a transgressor of the law.

The one who commanded us not to commit adultery or kill is the Lord. We may watch over the law outwardly and never commit adultery or physically kill someone. This royal law that was being broken in Jerusalem was actually like murder. By despising the poor man who came into the church and respecting the rich man above him, the people were committing murder in God's eyes; the very One Who gave the law (Matthew 5:20-22). Mental murder is the same as the outward act in God's eyes.

C. The Appeal for Equality

Jas 2:12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be (are about to be) judged (krino: to judge) by the law of liberty.

James tells the congregation to be speaking and acting like responsible believers knowing the God of the law is observing them over their shoulders. We as believers are never alone, and our every action is judged and weighed by the Lord. He has left his law in our heart, and we are to observe it. The way to keep all of the laws of the Word is by observing the royal law; "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

Jas 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

For he shall have judgment without mercy, (on the one) that hath shown no mercy, and mercy rejoiceth (exults) against (over) judgment.

The Lord will quickly judge divisions in the congregation caused by respect of persons. He will do it without mercy on the one who has been so quick to judge others. God will deal only so long in mercy toward the one who is judging and then he will come to vindicate the one being judged.

God would rather the person who is judging repent and be restored to fellowship. This causes God's judgment to be overridden by His mercy. God delights in showing mercy to His children.

In "mercy triumphs over judgment," triumph is a military term meaning victory in war. It is as if God's mercy is warring against His justice until one finally wins out. If no repentance is found, judgment will win out. If repentance is found, God rejoices and exalts in mercy winning over judgment.

2. Faith's Production of Works (14-26)

James spends the remainder of the chapter explaining the importance of works as an expression of faith in the believer's life. James explains that if there is a brother or sister in need and an individual has the means to meet that need but does not and instead says, "Go in peace and be blessed," his faith is without effect; it is inoperative. Faith without works is dead.

A. The Character of Useless Faith

Jas 2:14 What *doth it* profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith (that faith) save him?

Versus 14 through 26 develop one theme: the relationship of faith and works. The question in this verse is rhetorical. There is no profit to faith if there are no corresponding actions.

Faith and works are mentioned ten times in these thirteen verses. James is teaching the same thing Jesus taught (Matthew 7:24-27). Doing the Word of God brings a solid foundation to the believer's life. This foundation will cause the spiritual structure to be strong against the storms of life.

Some of the believers in Jerusalem had gone from one extreme to the other. They came from Jewish legalism where all of the emphasis had been on human works. Now that they had been born again and had heard the message of grace, they had little use for works in their lives. James is telling them that without works, their faith was useless to the masses of unbelievers they encountered daily. Good works are a tool of witnessing.

Some have accused James of contradicting Paul's teaching on grace (Romans 3:28, 4:1-12; Galatians 3: 6-14), but this is false. Paul's emphasis is salvation before God—the new birth. James's emphasis is salvation before the world. This is a demonstration of our justification to bring the world to the knowledge of Jesus as Lord. Paul and James are not fighting each other, but they are fighting two different enemies.

Paul is fighting the unbeliever who insists on works to bring salvation. James is fighting the believer who insists that works have no place in the Christian life. The unbeliever puts up a barrier between himself and God. The believer puts up a barrier between himself and the world. Look at Jesus. The Bible tells us he increased in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). Toward God, He had faith. Toward the world, he had works (John 9:4).

This does not mean that faith cannot save an individual, but rather that faith without outward works is useless in displaying salvation. The world around us needs the witness of our lives, and good works are the obvious display of our salvation.

Jas 2:15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

There must have been quite a bit of poverty in the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:35, 6:1, 11:29-30). The term “naked” does not mean without clothes; it means poorly dressed (cf. Matthew 25:36, John 21:7). This person is not to be overlooked in the daily operations of the Christian life. We are not to be so taken up in the pursuit of money that we forget about the ultimate use of finances (Ephesians 4:28). Our ultimate responsibility is to the body of Christ (Galatians 6:10) to show them love, not only in word, but also in service to their needs (1 John 3:17-18). The person in this verse is cold and hungry and has no natural means of solving their own problem.

Jas 2:16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

And one of you (congregation) say unto them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

The response of the congregational member for the brother or sister in need is a façade of caring, but it is not indicative of a true desire to really see them doing better. Their response also seems to indicate that they have other things on their mind and are pressed for time. They want to act concerned, but this emergency meeting has bothered them and changed their priorities for the day. They say, “Depart in peace” but really mean just “Depart.” The term “Go in peace” was a popular expression in the ancient world (Mark 5:34, Acts 16:36). Jesus used it to dismiss those who had come to him for help (Luke 7:50, 8:48), but only after he had met their need. This congregational member only offers words with no physical health.

B. Faith or Facade

Two factors must be true to make this reaction from a believer a facade:

1. True Need: The person in need truly has a need and is not taking advantage of the generosity of other Christians.
2. True Ability: The person being asked to give has the financial means to supply the need presented.

If a person being asked to meet a need financially cannot, this answer may not be wrong. This could be a prayer of agreement for the person to be warmed and filled. Concern and faith are

the foundational ingredients for any response to another person's need. But the person who can supply the need speaks empty words when they say, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled."

The term "be warmed and filled" is in the passive voice. The one in need is being told that someone else will warm and fill him, but the one speaking does not intend to be the one meeting the need. Inoperative faith, dead faith, produces no desire to act. That is why James asks, "What does it profit?"

Jas 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

James assumes that faith is inoperative and alone if it does not have works to accompany it. The members of the congregation should make this assumption also. James is surprised that they do not. This type of faith is lifeless in its ability to save anyone in spiritual or physical trouble.

Jas 2:18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Yea, (But), a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works . . .

James is anticipating an argument. This statement is an expression of arrogance from a particular worker in the congregation. When this worker states that he has works and James has faith, he is inadvertently spotlighting a division in the Jerusalem church (one that still exists in the church today). One crowd spoke of faith but that's all they did. They had few works. The other crowd had many works but rarely studied God's Word or built their faith. This person fills his day with witnessing, visiting the poor and widows, but has little time for those who speak of faith. This is also the most vocal crowd in the church because they speak evil of the ones who do not go with them in pursuit of good works. This person has spoken up to James and offered the argument, which led James to write this chapter.

Both extremes are wrong, and James is now going to address the purpose of works in the Christian life. The Word of God is not to be divided up with proponents choosing sides. Verses can be found on faith, study, and prayer; but there are also verses on witnessing, laying hands on the sick, and casting out devils. One crowd does the work. The other believes and confesses for it to be done. Both have Scriptures to back their differing views. But these verses are not to be chosen to support two different sides of an argument. They are to be combined to produce balance and power in the Christian life.

The two issues are not to be fought over; rather they are to be used together as two parts of a whole. The faith crowd needs to begin to work and the works crowd needs to believe and confess God's Word ahead of their works. Faith without works will lead to boredom and apathy. Works

without faith will lead to burnout, frustration, and many times, to sin. People operating in either extreme eventually leave the church and often, the Christian life.

. . . show (exhibit) me thy faith without (apart from) thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.

James tells this man that his faith and works cannot be separated. Faith and its production cannot be parted any more than a tree and its fruit. Works should be done before both the church and the world to exhibit our faith. This is God's purpose, to meet the needs of believers and present the gospel to the world.

Jas 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe -- and tremble!

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils (daimon) also believe, and tremble (phrissousin: shudder, bristle).

The Greek reads, "You believe God is one, that is good. Demons also believe this and it causes their hair to bristle." James is saying intellectual assent is not true faith. Just to say you believe in the one God does not save you. James puts this person in the same category as demons who also believe there is one God but are not changed by that belief. Demons even speak of this in the Scriptures (Mark 1:23-24, 5:1-10; Luke 8:26-33). Demons also know what awaits them in eternity (Matthew 8:29, 25:41).

James wants his congregation to understand that having faith not acted upon is no better than an unbeliever who does not act on his faith for salvation. Mental assent will no more change a Christian than it does a sinner.

Jas 2:20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

But wilt thou (are you willing to) know (recognize), O vain man, that faith without (apart from) works is dead (arge: barren, unproductive)?

A believer who has faith and no outward works is no better than a sinner or demon who believes but does not act. One has no justification before God and the other no justification before the world. This believer is called "vain"; he is empty or lacking even the remotest amount of spiritual common sense.

B. Faith Manifested Through Works

Jas 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Abraham is called the father of those present. These were both Jewish and Gentile believers. Once a person is a believer, they are in the family of God and joined to the family of faith with Abraham, whether they be Jew (Romans 4:1, 12) or Gentile (Romans 4:16-17; Galatians 3:7, 29). Abraham is the father of all believers (Romans 4:11).

Abraham was certainly justified by faith thirty years before he offered Isaac on the altar before the Lord (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:9). When he was justified by faith, it was before God. When he offered Isaac, he was justified before men. His act of unwavering trust and faith in the Lord was a testimony of stability before the world. The testimony was not that he was offering Isaac, but that the Lord would rescue his son and replace him with another sacrifice. Deliverance is the testimony, not human sacrifice. And even though Abraham had never heard of someone being raised from the dead, he was so sure of the Lord's promise that he knew God would raise Isaac from the dead if he did kill him (Hebrews 11: 17-19).

Hebrews 11 is a list of those who were justified before men when they acted on their faith. So it is not only a list of those people who were full of faith, but of their accompanying works. Abraham's works, as well as the works of others found in Hebrews 11 were not a proof of the faith, but an outward display, a visible witness of Jesus Christ.

Jas 2:22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

Seest thou how faith wrought with (sunergei: worked along side) his works, and by works was faith made perfect (eteleiothe: matured, brought to its ultimate goal)?

James says, "Do you see?" Abraham did something that could be seen. These people needed to do something that could be seen. By Abraham's actions, a lesson was taught to the Jerusalem congregation. By the actions of the saints in James's church, the people of Jerusalem should see faith in action and, as a result, want to accept Jesus as their Savior. These actions are said by James to work alongside of faith to bring faith to its ultimate conclusion or goal. The ultimate goal is to be seen before men (Matthew 5:14-16). This brings the believer into the maturity God wants him to have. Without works before men, faith cannot be brought into full maturity. The Word builds faith (Romans 10:17). Works matures faith.

Jas 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed (logizomai: counted, calculated) unto him for righteousness; and he was called the Friend of God.

In Genesis 15:6, when Abraham offered Isaac on the altar, his righteousness came into full maturity as his actions work alongside of his faith toward the common goal. Before this time, Abraham was seen as righteous just as any believer was, but now he had a special position with God. He was already a servant, but now he was a friend (John 15:15).

A hearer of the Word is a child of God or a servant of God. A doer of the Word is a friend of God (John 15:14). Abraham did not seek after God to make him his friend. Quite the opposite, God sought after Abraham desiring to make him His friend. The same is true today as we become workers before men; and those of us who show the world His Son through our lives, God calls us friends.

Jas 2:24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

James concludes, and hopes his congregation does to, that works are necessary to complete the process of justification. Faith before the Lord is sufficient for entrance into heaven, but not for rewards. Rewards in heaven will be a display of our faith. They will be given for our works, the display of faith on the earth.

Jas 2:25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way?

Likewise (omoiōs: the same way), also was not Rahab the harlot justified (declared righteous) by works, when she had received (upodexamene: welcomed) the messengers, and sent them out another way?

And another example of one whose faith was perfected through her actions was Rahab (Joshua 2: 1-11, 6:17, 22, 25). Because of her actions, her faith, which had been placed in the Lord many years before, was now made.

Jas 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

The body needs the spirit and the spirit needs the body. Faith needs works and works needs faith.

Chapter Summary

James has a pastor's love for his people, and he is concerned about the partiality he sees in his congregation as well as the lack of understanding of the importance of works as an overflow of true faith. Many were reacting like the world by preferring the rich over the poor, and James warned about the divisions that could arise and ultimately, the swift judgment of God that could result from such attitudes. He stressed the importance of good works in the Christian life and explained that without works, faith is dead and ineffective.