

JAMES 2

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to James chapter 2 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

If you remember from our previous studies, James is writing to Jewish believers who have been scattered outside of the land of Israel because of the persecution that came upon them for their faith in Christ. James put it like this, “**To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.**” James 1:1b.

This took place after the stoning of Stephen. It is then that the persecution against these Jewish believers increased tremendously!

And let’s face it, when persecution comes upon our lives, when things get difficult and people are against us, it is easy to get discouraged.

I think that is why we see James start much differently than we see Paul in his letters. He does not start with a few chapters on doctrine but he gets right to the heart of the matter, what these Jewish believers were encountering and how they should respond in the midst of this persecution.

And what James has to say is probably what most people don’t want to hear, but it is what they need to hear, and I guess I should say it is what we need to hear.

James puts it like this as he says, “**My Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.**” James 1:2-4.

As hard as that may be to swallow, it is what they needed to hear, and like I have said, it is what we need to hear.

You see, James wants them to allow God to grow them through these trials and not let Satan tempt them to sin because of them!

Some very important lessons for us, especially in the days we are living in!

Now, in James chapter 2 the focus is on ***THE BELIEVER IN SERVICE***, how we are to treat each other in the body of Christ.

You see, human nature has a way of exalting one person and putting down another and James is telling us that this should not be taking place in the life of a believer. True faith will manifest godly character, godly action on our part.

In other words, as James reminds us in James 1:22, **“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”**

Warren Wiersbe put it like this. He wrote,

Not only is the mature Christian patient in testing (James 1), but he also practices the truth. This is the theme of James 2. Immature people talk about their beliefs, but the mature person lives his faith. Hearing God’s Word (James 1:22-25) and talking about God’s Word can never substitute for doing God’s Word.

Every believer has some statement of faith or personal expression of what he believes. Most churches have such statements and members are asked to subscribe to the statement and practice it. Most churches also have a “covenant” that they read publicly, often when they observe the Lord’s Supper. Statements of faith and church covenants are good and useful, but they are not substitutes for doing God’s will.

As a pastor, I have heard believers read the church covenant and then come to a business meeting and act in ways completely contrary to the covenant.

James wanted to help us practice God's Word, so he gave us a simple test. He sent two visitors to a church service, a rich man and a poor man; and he watched to see how they were treated.

The way we behave toward People indicates what we really believe about God! We cannot - and dare not - separate human relationships from divine fellowship.

“If a man say, ‘I love God,’ and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20)

- Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – NT*, pp. 860-861

Make no mistake about it, James does not pull any punches, he lays it all out for us and then it is up to us to live as God has called us to live or we can reject that. But then you are a hearer of the Word of God and not a doer of the Word of God and, as we will see, James says that is just an empty faith. A lot of words but no action!

One more point before we get to our text and this is important for us to understand. James is not giving to us another way of salvation, that of works. He is not speaking contrary to what Paul has said about saving faith being by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

His point is simple. True faith will manifest itself in your life, and false faith or carnal faith will not. And James is going to hit that one hard this evening.

So with that said, let's begin reading in James chapter 2, starting in verse 1, and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study the Word of God.

JAMES 2**VERSES 1-4**

As we read this, we need to understand the period of time that James wrote this letter and what was going on. You see, during this time there was a lot of prejudice, all kinds of discrimination against people.

People were placed in categories like Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or Barbarian.

Now thank God we are not like that today . . . or are we like that today? We would never behave like those people back then, would we?

The reality is, we really haven't changed much over the years, we still judge people on the color of their skin, their nationality, what they wear, how they look, the jobs they have or even what church they go to!

Some of you remember or have heard about the Jesus Movement in the late 1960's as God had touched a large group of young people, the hippies.

And you know how they dressed. They had tie-dyed tee-shirts, bell-bottom jeans, sandals or sometimes no shoes at all, the guys had long hair.

They, in a sense, were looked down by society, but now they are saved, they are Christians.

Thus, they showed up at church looking like they always did and the sad thing here is that many churches told them to go home and change their clothes, put a suit and tie on, cut their hair, put some shoes on or they could not come through the doors of their church!

But there was a man named Chuck Smith who was the Pastor of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa and he allowed them into the church and they sat and listened to the teaching of God's Word for 1 hour and sometimes 1½ hours or more. God gave them worship songs and God did a mighty work in them and through them because one man was willing to accept them as they were and not judge them by their clothes or whatever!

That is what James is dealing with here with this example.

And it is interesting how he starts this out. He does so by saying, "**My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.**" James 2:1.

What is his point?

As believers, we should never show partiality, we should never discriminate because our Lord is not a respecter of people and we are to follow His example for us!

Notice what Paul said in Romans 2:11, "**For there is no partiality with God.**"

The Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, "**For God shows no partiality [undue favor or unfairness; with Him one man is not different from another]. [Deut 10:17; 2 Chron 19:7.]**"

The Living Bible puts it like this, "**For God treats everyone the same.**"

The New Living Translation puts it this way, "**For God does not show favoritism.**"

And we even see this in the Old Testament, as we are told in Deuteronomy 10:17, "**For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.**"

Thus, if God shows not favoritism, neither should we!

Now, as we have read, James gives to them and to us a hypothetical example of what he is talking about, we might call it "***The Shortsighted Usher!***"

But the reality is, this is for all of us to look at so we may examine our own hearts and make sure we are treating everyone the same as God desires us to treat them!

You see, as I shared with you about the hippies and how many churches rejected them because of their dress and-so-on, many do the same today and as much as this is a hypothetical story, it is truly one that continues to happen today!

As we read this, we need to keep in mind that James is writing to Jewish believers before Gentiles were widely received into the church, before the Gospel message went forth to the Gentiles.

Thus, the Greek word that James uses for “**assembly**” is literally “*synagogue*” or the place the Jews gathered to worship.

Interestingly enough, this is the only place in the New Testament where Christians are said to have assembled together in a synagogue to worship God.

Paul, in speaking to the church in Colosse made this observation maybe some 20 to 30 years or so from when James wrote his letter as the Gospel message spread to the Gentiles.

This is what Paul wrote, “**We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.**” Colossians 1:3-6.

And today the Word of God continues to spread bringing salvation to all who will receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior! There is no partiality with God and thus, there should be none with us as well!

Let's go back to this period of time and you can see how these divisions came. You see, in the Roman society the rich would wear rings on their left hand to show their prosperity and if you wanted, for special occasions, you could even rent these rings, making yourself look like something that maybe you really were not, wealthy.

And here comes this rich person into the church, and as the usher sees him he not only greets this rich man, but he also sits him down in the best seat, he honors this man's riches, he shows partiality to him!

Well, right after the rich man enters and is seated in the good seats, here comes a very poor man who is filthy, has nothing and yet he too has come to worship God.

The usher sees him, but, wanting to save the good seats for the big tithers, the rich, he places him on the floor or makes him stand in the back.

Now, as wrong as that is in the world, it is completely wrong in the church!

Does this happen today?

Yes, more than I like to admit.

I remember one story that took place several years ago where this woman, wearing very filthy clothes, came to a church and the ushers refused to let her in until she dressed better.

Sadly, that is all she had, she could not afford fancy clothes and thus, she could not worship God.

How sad that is, and I thank God for the ushers we have here who welcome all, they are not a respecter of people.

But again, it is something we as individuals need to be on guard against!

Why do we see some act like that? Because the wealthy give more money, have more influence and they want them to keep coming.

The reality is, from what the statistics show, the poor give far more than the rich do!

And folks, that is never the issue!

We tend to look at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart!

We think the wealthy are more important and maybe they are blessed more by God than the poor – but that is not true, not at all!

We respond with partiality because we want something out of that relationship, it is a selfish motive and it is an evil motive according to James.

Let me show you how important it is to not be a respecter of people but to love them, reach out to them as you would your best friend! We are told,

Mahatma Gandhi shares in his autobiography that in his student days in England he was deeply touched by reading the Gospels and seriously considered becoming a convert to Christianity, which seemed to offer a real solution to the caste system that divided the people of India.

One Sunday he attended church services and decided to ask the minister for enlightenment on salvation and other doctrines.

But when Gandhi entered the sanctuary, the ushers refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go elsewhere to worship with his own people.

He left and never came back. “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said to himself, “I might as well remain a Hindu!”

- R. Kent Hughes, Acts – The Church Afire, p. 149

That should never happen, but it did, and it does!

Listen to what Solomon said about how God feels regarding our treatment of the poor in Proverbs 14:31, **“He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.”**

And in Proverbs 22:2 we are told, **“The rich and the poor have this in common, The LORD is the maker of them all.”**

The bottom line is this, **“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”** James 2:1.

In fact, the Lord looks at the heart, because that is the issue. Remember what we are told in I Samuel 16:7, **“For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”**

May we not be a respecter of persons, but treat people, all people, with the *LOVE OF GOD!*

VERSES 5-7

First of all, let me say this. Just because a person is rich doesn't mean he can't get saved. Rich and poor people get saved all the time.

The point is many times for the rich person they don't see their need for God. On the other hand, the poor person has nothing and all he can obtain is God in his life.

Hiebert makes this interesting point, ***“Church history demonstrates the comparatively more poor people than rich have responded to the Gospel.”***

Let me show you the lesson Jesus teaches us on this.

Remember in Matthew chapter 19 as the rich young ruler came to Jesus wanting to know what he needed to do to have eternal life?

In that story Jesus is drawing this man to Himself and there is one thing that is blocking his relationship with the Savior- that is his riches!

Jesus told him to sell everything he had and give it to the poor and he would have eternal life.

You see, his treasures would be in the Savior and not in his riches, he would have treasures in heaven if he followed Jesus.

The response of this man is given to us in Matthew 19:22 which says, **“But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”**

Please understand that Jesus is not telling us to sell everything and become poor or you are not saved, not at all!

You see, for this man, this was an issue, and it kept him out of the kingdom of God as we have seen.

And, in Matthew 19:23-24 we are told, **“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’”**

Here is the reality. It is impossible for a rich man to be saved, and it is impossible for any of us to be saved.

Don't fret, because in Matthew 19:26 we are told, **“But Jesus looked at them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”**

If it wasn't for God, none of us would be saved, but again, for the rich, it seems to be harder for them to give up their riches, it seems to stumble them from coming to the Savior, to Jesus! But, obviously it is not impossible!

Now, back here in James, notice again what he says in James 2:5, “**... Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. . . .**”

Now, in saying that, how can the poor be rich – that doesn’t make sense?

Because of their faith in Jesus they have been adopted into the family of God and they are joint heirs with Christ just as we are.

Think about it. You can be the richest man in the world and not saved and it is all vanity, the grasping for the wind, as Solomon reminds us. In other words, apart from Christ, you are poor no matter how much material wealth you may have!

And yet, for those who are materially poor, listen to what Paul said in Romans 8:16-17, “**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.**”

Also, James wants to remind them what the rich were doing to them, and I believe he is talking about the rich unsaved person.

The rich oppress them, the rich drag them into court, they take advantage of them, they treat them like dirt and worst of all, they mock their faith in the true and living God.

And now they show partiality to them?

That doesn’t make sense.

But, again, for gain they do this.

Now, why do the rich behave like this? Why do they oppress and sue and mock the poor, take advantage of people?

Paul, in I Timothy 6:9-10 tells us, **“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”**

You see, the love of money causes people to do evil things to gain more money but there is never true satisfaction found in money, you are always desiring more of it.

That is why Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, **“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”**

Or as The Amplified Bible puts it, **“But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides.”**

A heart that is focused upon Jesus is a heart that is satisfied in Jesus and what the Lord has done in that person’s heart will be manifested in their lives, how they treat people!

VERSES 8-9

What is this royal law all about?

Keep in mind that the Law of Moses could tell me not to steal, but it could not force me to share what belongs to me with another person.

As Christians, we are not under the Law of Moses but the law of love or the royal law, which is even greater than the Law of Moses!

Thus, this royal law forbids me from mistreating or taking advantage of another, why?

Because, as we read in Leviticus 19:18 **“you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

I am to love people as I love myself and I am to treat them as I would want them to treat me.

Keep in mind that Jesus took the 613 commandments in the Law and he brought them down to just two. We are told in Matthew 22:34-40, **“But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”**

Love is the fulfillment of the Law and that is what James is speaking of. If you are a Christian, then what is manifested in your life should be the things of Jesus!

Now let me also say this. Don't come to the conclusion that we are to mistreat the rich, not at all. It goes against what we have just been talking about.

The problem comes when we show partiality to the rich and put down the poor man.

In some churches people are promoted into leadership positions because of their status in society, their wealth and that is a disaster.

You look to put people in leadership that are saved, that have servants' hearts and as God leads.

And here is the thing we need to remember. All are important in God's eyes and we should not show partiality to the rich or the poor.

Thus, if we fulfill the royal law, the supreme law and if we love as Christ loves, we will keep the commands of God.

Jesus said in John 13:34-35, “**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**”

If you don't, then you are missing the mark that God has set, you are disobeying Him, and your walk is not matching your talk!

Also, we are also to show respect to those that are in authority over us. To the elderly, both in the church and outside the church, in society. It doesn't make them better, but they are to be respected for the position that God has placed them in.

In Leviticus 19:32 we are told, “**You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD.**”

And Paul tells us in I Thessalonians 5:12-13, “**And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.**”

And in Romans 13:1, “**Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.**”

Not partiality but respect. Don't put them on a pedestal but honor them and respect them.

THE ROYAL LAW!

VERSES 10-13

In other words, you can't pick and choose which Laws you want to keep and which ones you don't want to keep. All 613 are together and thus, you break one then you have broken them all!

Now many try to justify themselves by saying that they are a good person and thus, God will accept them into heaven.

First of all, the Bible says that there are none who are good, not one. Romans 3:12)

It says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God! (Romans 3:23)

So you are already guilty!

But let me give you a visual picture to show you that if you even break one of the Laws of God, you are sunk.

Think of just the Ten Commandments, not all 613 commandments. And think of those Ten Commandments as boards on a ship. Imagine that you are missing just one board on the hull of the ship, what would happen to that ship?

It would sink!

That is the point that James is making, that if you just try to keep the Law to be saved, by breaking just one of the Laws of God, you are sunk, you are going to be judged!

In other words, the Law demands moral perfection from a person to gain access into heaven.

I had a gentleman from the House of Yahweh call me several years back, which is a cult, and try to tell me they keep the Law of God for their salvation.

And I asked him if he kept all 613 commandments of God to the fullest, not breaking one of them. I told him that James tells us if you are trying to keep the Law for salvation if you break one of them you are guilty of all of them.

And he told me that they were only responsible for keeping the one's they knew.

Well, I couldn't let that slide and I told him if that were true then it was better that he didn't know any of the Laws of God and that would assure his salvation.

He had nothing to say because that was true, if you are going to live by the Law for your salvation, you will die by the Law.

Paul put it this way in Romans, and I have touched on this, but listen carefully to what Paul had to say. He wrote, **“As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one.’ . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”**
3:10, 23-26.

And James speaks of showing mercy to people, not giving them what they deserve, why?

Because we deserve death and our merciful God has given to us life through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thus, we should be merciful, or God will judge us as we treat others.

It is as Jesus said in Matthew 7:1-2, **“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”**

Now James is not speaking of losing our salvation but as we appear before the judgment seat of Christ for our rewards God will look at our heart and see what was the motivating factor of our actions, how we treated people!

VERSE 14

Now here is where Martin Luther had a huge problem with James because he felt James was teaching that our salvation was a combination of faith plus works, and thus, he did not believe that James should be with the other canonical books, he felt it was not inspired by God!

But, as I have said before, James is not saying that our salvation is a combination of faith plus works but a faith that works is the evidence for our salvation.

And that is what James is speaking about here in this chapter and he will hit this pretty hard, as you will see.

Thus, James is speaking of a person who is all talk and no walk – their actions show they are not saved.

And the way this is structured in the Greek, a negative response is anticipated! In other words, faith without works does not profit you at all!

Let me give you this example to show you what I mean.

If I told you there was a bomb in this building that was to go off in just two minutes and I said that I was 100% sure of this happening but then I just continued talking and not running out of the building, then my faith is empty, it is not real because my actions reflect that.

But, if I was screaming that there is a bomb in the building and it is going off in two minutes as I was running out the door, I think you would believe me and follow me out the door because my faith was based in actions!

You see, faith alone saves but a saving faith is never alone, it is reflected or manifested in our actions, the things we do!

Remember what Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**

That is how we are saved, by Grace through Faith and not by the Law through Works, but then that saving faith is worked out in our lives, in the things that we do as Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 2:10, **“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”**

Also, notice what Paul says in Titus 3:8, **“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.”**

May our faith in Christ be manifested in our outward actions as we minister to people, as we show them the love of Christ!

The seventeenth-century English Preacher Thomas Brooks wrote the following words that fit what we are speaking of here. He wrote,

Christ hath freed you from all your enemies, from the curse of the law, the predominant damnatory power of sin, the wrath of God, the sting of death, and the torments of hell; but what is the end and design of Christ in doing these great and marvelous things for his people?

It is not that we should throw off duties of righteousness and holiness, but that their hearts may be the more free and sweet in all holy duties and heavenly services. . . . Ah, souls! I know no such arguments to work you to a lively and constant performance of all heavenly services, like those that are drawn from the consideration of the great and glorious things that Christ hath done for you.

- Precious Remedies Against Satan’s Devices, Banner of Truth Trust, 1984, pp. 123-124

Look at all that God has done for us; may we serve Him with hearts filled with love and reaching out to people with His love that they may see our faith is real!

VERSES 15-17

If our faith is living, if it is real, then it will have life to it, it will be seen in the things we do for people.

And there is truly a balance. Yes, we need to share the Gospel message with people but if they are hungry, cold it is hard for them to even think in that direction.

So as we meet their physical needs, as they see we love them unconditionally, then a door is open to share Jesus with them.

Now, dead faith is just that, it does nothing.

James says that this person may use some spiritual jargon to make themselves look good, but it is a dead faith, there is no life to it, just words!

One writer put it like this. He wrote,

This is a well-chosen analogy, because compassion is one of the evidences of true regeneration.

The story is told of a European queen several centuries ago who left her coachman sitting outside during the winter while she attended the theater. The drama was so heart wrenching that the queen sobbed throughout the entire performance.

But when she returned to the carriage and discovered the coachman had frozen to death, she did not shed a tear! She was deeply moved by a fictional tragedy but completely untouched by a real one with which she was directly involved and for which she was even directly responsible.

It is amazing that so many people can become emotionally involved in a movie, play, popular song, or TV program, weeping over tragedies and becoming incensed at wrongs and injustices, and yet show no concern or compassion for the plight of a neighbor or acquaintance who is in real need.

In our artificial, self-centered world, fantasy often becomes more meaningful than reality.

- John MacArthur

Can you imagine someone who is so uncaring? And yet we see that today. May we keep our eyes open and see the needs of others and help them.

And Warren Wiersbe put it like this,

Even in the early church there were those who claimed they had saving faith, yet did not possess salvation. Wherever there is the true, you will find the counterfeit. Jesus warned, "Not every one that saith unto Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven" (Matt 7:21).

People with dead faith substitute words for deeds. They know the correct vocabulary for prayer and testimony, and can even quote the right verses from the Bible; but their walk does not measure up to their talk. They think that their words are as good as works, and they are wrong.

James gave a simple illustration. A poor believer came into a fellowship, without proper clothing and in need of food. The person with dead faith noticed the visitor and saw his needs, but he did not do anything to meet the needs. All he did was say a few pious words! "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed" (James 2:16, NIV). But the visitor went away just as hungry and naked as he came in!

Food and clothing are basic needs of every human being, whether he is saved or unsaved. “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Tim 6:8). “Therefore take no thought, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or, ‘What shall we drink?’ or, ‘Wherewithal shall we be clothed?’ . . . for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matt 6:31-32). Jacob included these basic needs in His prayer to God: “If God will be with me . . . and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on” (Gen 28:20).

As believers, we have an obligation to help meet the needs of people, no matter who they may be. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me” (Matt 25:40).

To help a person in need is an expression of love, and faith works by love (Gal 5:6). The Apostle John emphasized this aspect of good works. “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and truth” (1 John 3:17-18, NIV).

The priest and Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan each had religious training, but neither of them paused to assist the dying man at the side of the road (Luke 10:25-37). Each of them would defend his faith, yet neither demonstrated that faith in loving works.

The question in James 2:14 should read, “Can that kind of faith save him?” What kind?

The kind of faith that is never seen in practical works. The answer is no! Any declaration of faith that does not result in a changed life and good works is a false declaration. That kind of faith is dead faith. “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17).

The great theologian, John Calvin, wrote, “It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.” The word alone in James 2:17 simply means “by itself.” True saving faith can never be by itself: it always brings life, and life produces good works.

The person with dead faith has only an intellectual experience. In his mind, he knows the doctrines of salvation, but he has never submitted himself to God and trusted Christ for salvation. He knows the right words, but he does not back up his words with his works. Faith in Christ brings life (John 3:16), and where there is life there must be growth and fruit. Three times in this paragraph, James warns us that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17,20,26).

Beware of a mere intellectual faith. No man can come to Christ by faith and remain the same any more than he can come into contact with a 220-volt wire and remain the same. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12). Dead faith is not saving faith. Dead faith is counterfeit faith and lulls the person into a false confidence of eternal life.

- Warren Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – NT, pp. 863-864

Some important points that we need to think about!

VERSES 18-19

I think that James is anticipating what some might say here.

They may have said something like this, “***Hey, wait a minute. I have the gift of faith and you have the gift of works, so what is the problem with that?***”

This is pretty simple; it is not Scriptural and that is exactly what James is saying. You can’t have faith without works!

I know that may be hard for some of you to believe but James nails it here when he speaks of the demons believing in the true and living God – they have faith is the point that James is making but they are not saved by this faith!

What do I mean by that or what is James saying about these demons and faith?

James' point is that passive faith is not the kind of faith that saves, and he points to the demons who believe the facts about Jesus and the gospel. They understand that He is the virgin born Son of God who died for the sins of mankind and rose from the dead. But they are not going to heaven!

Remember the story of Jesus as He encountered the demon possessed man in the area of the Gadarenes in Mark chapter 5.

When Jesus came upon this man, we are told in Mark 5:6-7, **“When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. And he cried out with a loud voice and said, ‘What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me.’”**

You see, these demons are fallen angels who sided with Lucifer when he rebelled against God, and he took one-third of the angels with him in his rebellion.

Thus, they know who God is, and they know their final destiny, but they are not saved, like I have said.

Their faith is empty because they have no works, there is nothing to show that their faith is real! Their faith is not active!

You can't see faith without works is the point that James is making here!

And now James is going to look at Abraham and the faith or I should say the works of Abraham. Listen to what we are told.

VERSES 20-24

James now goes back to the Old Testament and he is using it to demonstrate what he has already said about the character of a living faith, showing that a faith that is not accompanied with works is a dead faith that cannot save.

And please understand that it was not the works of Abraham that justified him for in Genesis 15:6 we are told, “**And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.**”

Then years later we see his faith that was demonstrated by his willingness to offer his only son, Isaac, showing that he did trust God.

In Hebrews 11:17-19 we see the faith of Abraham in action as Paul tells us, “**By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.**”

Faith and works cooperating together as we see here in the life of Abraham!

Now, if there is no evidence of this new life, then there is no genuine saving faith!

Spurgeon put it like this, “*The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul.*”

VERSES 25-26

This is interesting. James now looks at Rahab and her faith in action. Why Abraham and then Rahab, of all people?

One writer put it like this, *“He designedly put together two persons so different in their character, in order more clearly to shew, that no one, whatever may have been his or her condition, nation, or class in society, has ever been counted righteous without good works.”*

(Calvin, cited in Hiebert)

Let’s take a minute and look at Rahab, who is another example of living faith as she believed in the God of Israel and hid the Jewish spies who came to Jericho; (Joshua 2:8-13).

You see, her faith was living because she did something with it, her faith was active!

Notice again what James has done here?

He speaks of the faith of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, showing that he believed in God and the evidence of his faith was seen in his actions, his obedience to God’s Words!

Then he speaks of Rahab, a Gentile, showing that her faith was real as she helped God’s people even at her own expense, placing her life in jeopardy!

Maybe James is rebuking them for their partiality they were showing towards the Jewish believers and putting down these newly converted Gentile Christians who were coming into the church.

Thus, James gives them an example of both Jew and Gentile showing it is not a matter of nationality, but of faith and a faith that works.

Paul put it this way in Ephesians 2:11-22 as he is speaking of the walls of prejudice, the walls of separation coming down, **“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh - who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands - that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”**

Again, no partiality with God and there should be none with us!

Now, as James concludes this section, he once again states the fact that faith without works is a dead faith.

It can't save you.

Calvin put it this way, *“Man is not justified by faith alone, that is, by a bare and empty knowledge of God; he is justified by works, that is, his righteousness is known and proved by its fruits.”*

Again, please understand the point that James is making here. We are saved by Grace through Faith and not by the Law through Works, but our saving faith is seen, it is alive because of the things we do, the fruit that is born in our lives!

Just like it is possible to have a body with no spirit or life, a corpse, it is also possible for a person to have dead faith (void of the fruit and works of the Holy Spirit) which is unable to save or receive eternal life.

It is as Paul said in II Corinthians 13:5, **“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified.”**

It is a living faith, as seen in the examples of Abraham and Rahab, they passed the test of faith – they have shown their faith is real. How about you?