

# “A Study of James 2”

James 2:1-16

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## INTRODUCTION:

- A. Our study will be lifted from the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the 45<sup>th</sup> book in the Bible . . . James. 20<sup>th</sup> Book in the New Testament . . . The 15<sup>th</sup> of 21 Epistle Books.
- B. James is a book of practicality written to Jewish Christians who had been scattered throughout the Mediterranean world because of persecution.
1. Ranking among one of the earliest New Testament books written, perhaps even prior to 50 A.D., finds as its author one of the half-brothers to our Lord.
  2. Its five chapters can be easily summarized:
    - Chapter 1 . . . Confident Stand . . . . . What a Christian **HAS**
    - Chapter 2 . . . Compassionate Service . . . What a Christian **DOES**
    - Chapter 3 . . . Careful Speech . . . . . What a Christian **SAYS**
    - Chapter 4 . . . Contrite submission . . . . . What a Christian **FEELS**
    - Chapter 5 . . . Concerned Sharing . . . . . What a Christian **GIVES**
- C. In this second chapter James argues against favoritism and for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith:
1. **Commitment is an essential part of faith.** You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines or agreeing with Biblical facts. You must commit your mind and heart to Christ . . . Obedience.
  2. **Right actions are the natural by-products of true faith.** A genuine Christian will have a changed life
  3. **Faith without good deeds doesn't do anybody any good — it is useless.** James's teachings are consistent with Paul's teaching regarding faith and works. **PAUL EMPHASIZES THE PURPOSE OF FAITH IN OBEDIENCE — TO BRING SALVATION. JAMES EMPHASIZES THE RESULTS OF FAITH — A CHANGED LIFE.**
- D. Three types of faith is under consideration:
1. **DEAD** faith. 2:14-17
  2. **DEMONIC** faith. 2:18-19
  3. **DYNAMIC** faith. 2:20-26
- E. Dynamic faith involves the **WHOLE PERSON**:
1. **DEAD** faith touches only the intellect
  2. **DEMONIC** faith involves both the mind and the emotions.
  3. **DYNAMIC** faith involves the intellect, the emotions, and the will
    - a. The **MIND** understands the truth.
    - b. The **HEART** desires and rejoices in the truth.
    - c. The **WILL** acts upon the truth.

F. We are studying three great themes in this chapter.

1. The wrongfulness of showing of favoritism. James 2:1-7
2. The Royal Law of love is to be kept. James 2:8-13
3. The role of faith and works in the Christian life. James 2:14-16

## **SHOWING FAVORITISM IS A SIN. READ JAMES 2:1-7**

A. God wants us to be:

1. Real & genuine
2. Sincere
3. Honest
4. Truthful
5. Faithful
6. Compassionate
7. And His' always

B. Please bear in mind that the Church met in homes during the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Not enough seating. Many had to sit on the floor. Having a poor person give a rich person their seat.

- The wearing of a lot of rings was important in the Roman and Grecian world to note importance of the wearer.
- Obviously, the world treats the wealthy with greater deference and respect. Forbes magazine publishes an issue honoring the wealthiest 400 people in the world.
- Bill Gates' wealth always puts him in demand as a speaker, and even Christian schools and other works look for well-know, wealthy donors to feature in their promotional appeals.
- **Note:** Arab culture today . . . Long fingernail on the little finger as a sign they do not have to work. I have heard them speak of this.

C. The showing of Favoritism/Partiality . . . is wrong in the sight of God.

D. **ILLUSTRATION:** Mahatma Gandhi was the leader of the Indian Nationalist movement against British rule and is considered the father of his country (India). He is internationally esteemed for his doctrine of nonviolence to achieve political and social progress. He says in his autobiography that in his student days he was truly interested in the Bible. Deeply touched by reading the gospels, he seriously considered becoming a convert. Christianity seemed to offer the real solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India.

One Sunday, he went to a nearby church to attend services. He decided to see the minister and ask for instruction in the way of salvation and enlightenment on other doctrines. But when he entered the auditorium, the ushers refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go and worship with his own people ("with his own kind"). He left and never came back. 'If Christians have caste differences also,' he said to himself, I might as well

remain a Hindu'. Had those ushers not violated James 2:7, the people of India might be worshiping Jehovah God today instead of cows.

E. James condemns acts of favoritism. Why it is wrong to show favoritism to the wealthy.

1. It is inconsistent with Christ's teachings.
2. It results from evil thoughts and ulterior motives.
3. It insults people made in God's image.
4. It is a by-product of selfish motives.
5. It does against the Biblical definition of love.
6. It shows a lack of mercy to those less fortunate.
7. It is hypocritical.
8. It is sin.

F. James condemns acts of favoritism.

1. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby.
  - a. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures.
  - b. The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive life-style at our expense.
  - c. In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant.
  - d. Are you easily impressed by status, wealth, or fame? Are you partial to the "haves" while ignoring the "have nots"? This attitude is sinful. God views all people as equals, and if he favors anyone, it is the poor and the powerless. We should follow his example.
  - e. **ILLUSTRATION:** A lady in a faded gingham dress and her husband, dressed in a homespun threadbare suit, stepped off the train in Boston, and walked timidly without an appointment into the president of Harvard's outer office. The secretary could tell in a moment that such backwoods, country hicks had no business at Harvard and probably didn't even deserve to be in Cambridge. She frowned. "We want to see the president," the man said softly. "He'll be busy all day," the secretary snapped. "We'll wait," the lady replied. For hours, the secretary ignored them, hoping that the couple would finally become discouraged and go away. They didn't. And the secretary grew frustrated and finally decided to disturb the president, even though it was a chore she always regretted to do. "Maybe if they just see you for a few minutes, they'll leave," she told him. He sighed in exasperation and nodded. Someone of his importance obviously didn't have the time to spend with them, but he detested gingham dresses and homespun suits cluttering up his outer office.

The president, stern-faced with dignity, strutted toward the couple.

The lady told him, "We had a son that attended Harvard for one year. He loved Harvard. He was happy here. But about a year ago, he was accidentally killed. My husband and I would like to erect a memorial to him, somewhere on campus." The president wasn't touched, he was shocked. "Madam," he said gruffly. "We can't put up a statue for every person who attended Harvard and died. If we did, this place would look like a cemetery."

"Oh, no," the lady explained quickly. "We don't want to erect a statue. We thought we would like to give a building to Harvard." The president rolled his eyes. He glanced at the gingham dress and homespun suit, then exclaimed, "A building! Do you have any earthly idea how much a building costs? We have over seven and a half million dollars in the physical plant at Harvard."

For a moment the lady was silent. The president was pleased. He could get rid of them now. The lady turned to her husband and said quietly, "Is that all it costs to start a University? Why don't we just start our own?" Her husband nodded.

The president's face wilted in confusion and bewilderment. Mr. and Mrs. Leland Stanford walked away, traveling to Palo Alto, California where they established the University that bears their name, a memorial to a son that Harvard no longer cared about. Perhaps you have heard of Stanford University.

- f. **ILLUSTRATION:** Preacher in Chattanooga, TN. If you are wealthy, he has time for you. If not, then he doesn't.
  - g. **ILLUSTRATION:** Bro. Morris P. Landiss' Illustration about should he be in attendance in a small Tennessee congregation, would probable be asked to lead in prayer. If Dr. Athens Clay Pullias (President of then David Lipscomb College) came in, they would want him, not bro. Landiss (Chairman, English Department) to lead the prayer.
  - h. **Illustration:** Family on Staten Island. Gave the congregation's collection of clothing to them. Preacher did not want to be bothered in arranging to have them picked up for services. Had it been a rich banker who couldn't drive, I suspect he would have picked him up personally.
  - i. Favoritism in the Bible.
    1. Isaac showed partiality to Easu over Jacob.
    2. Rebekah showed partiality to Jacob over Esau.
    3. Jacob showed partiality to Joseph over his eleven brothers.
    4. In all three instances, problems resulted from the favoritism shown.
- G. Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status?
1. Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work.

2. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family.
3. Or it can even be the sign of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness. **By honoring someone just because he or she dresses well, we are making appearance more important than character.**
4. Sometimes we do this because:
  - a. Poverty makes us uncomfortable; we don't want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do.
  - b. We want to be wealthy too, and we hope to use the rich person as a means to that end.
  - c. We want the rich person to become a part of our home congregation and help support it financially. All these motives are selfish; they view neither the rich nor the poor person as a human being in need of fellowship. If we say that Christ is our Lord, then we must live as he requires, showing no favoritism and loving all people regardless of whether they are rich or poor.
5. We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly assume that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval.
  - a. But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Christ calls us to be ready to suffer for him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life.
  - b. We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life.

## **THE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE IS TO BE KEPT. READ**

### **JAMES 2:8-13**

- A. Love is the source from which our attitudes toward others should flow. This **royal command** is a law from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
  1. This law is God's will for his followers: "Love your neighbor as yourself." In the Old Testament one's neighbor would be a fellow Israelite; but Jesus' application included everyone with whom we might come into contact.
  2. James was calling his readers to obey the royal law of love that would forbid them to discriminate against anyone who entered their fellowship.
  3. We are to show favor to everyone, whether the person is rich or poor.
  4. We are to be kind, overlooking other superficial trappings
- B. Discrimination against anyone on the basis of dress, race, social class, wealth, sex, etc., is a clear violation of the royal law of love.
  1. We must treat all people as we would want to be treated.
  2. The Golden Rule: **Matthew 7:12** – "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."
  3. Our attitudes and actions toward others should be guided by love.

4. Why is a person who commits **one sin as guilty as the person who has broken all of God’s laws**? James’s point here is that no matter what commandment someone breaks, that person is guilty of an offense against God. He or she has violated the will of God.
  5. We cannot excuse the sin of favoritism by pointing to the rest of the good we do. Sin is not simply balanced against good—it must be confessed and forgiven. If we’ve broken just one law, we are sinners. We can’t decide to keep part of God’s law and ignore the rest. If we have broken it at all, we need Christ’s payment for our sin.
- C. Obedience must also be a lifestyle, a habit. **Whenever you speak and whatever you do** covers all human behavior. The believers would be **judged** on the basis of their obedience to God’s will as expressed in his law.
1. **Mercy** is precisely what the believers were *not* showing when they insulted poor people. If they continued to discriminate, they would be in danger of facing their own judgment without mercy. This is an excellent statement of New Testament ethics: **What we do to others we actually do to God, and he returns it upon our heads.** We stand before God in need of his mercy. But when we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, we show that we don’t understand or appreciate God’s mercy toward us.
  2. Not showing mercy places us only under the judgment of God, **but showing mercy places us under God’s mercy as well as his favorable judgment.**

## **FAITH & WORKS. READ: JAMES 2:14-26**

- A. The remainder of chapter 2 is often cited to show that the teachings of James and Paul were completely contradictory.
- James:** “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” **James 2:26**
- Paul:** “Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” **Romans 5:1**
- B. The doctrine of salvation by “faith alone” is a fundamental concept of the theology of many protestant religionists. It is, however, without Biblical support.
1. If there was nothing else but the book of James, that would be sufficient to refute this pernicious heresy.
  2. It is little wonder that Martin Luther, who popularized the faith-only dogma, was so agitated at the epistle of James.
    - a. He thought it was “right strawy” and unworthy of being in the Biblical canon . . . That is, unworthy of being in the Bible. He referred to it as “The Epistle of Straw.”

- b. He was wise enough to know that the Book of James could not be harmonized with the notion of "faith only."
  - c. Nonetheless, he was foolish enough to discard the book in deference to his espoused theory.
3. James declares that faith without works (obedience) is:
    - a. Profitless. 2:14-15
    - b. Unable to save. (2:14
    - c. Dead. 2:17, 26
    - d. Invisible. 2:18
    - e. Demonic 2:19
    - f. Barren 2:20
    - g. Imperfect 2:22
    - h. Unlike Abraham's 2:22-23
    - i. Incapable of justifying 2:24
  4. Of special focus here is the fact that even demons believe (2:19)
 

**If faith alone secures salvation, why do the demons tremble?**
- C. Demons were not **atheists**; they believed in God; moreover, they were not **polytheists**; they believed that God is "one" (James 2:19). Their faith, however, never had been coupled with obedience, hence, it was a "dead" faith" (James 2:14-16).
- D. **Good deeds** are the fruit of living **faith**. If there are no positive actions, then the professed faith **is no faith at all—it is dead and useless**.
- E. To illustrate, James refers to two well-known people in the Bible . . . **Abraham & Rahab**.
- Rahab's faith is commended in Hebrews 11:31
  - Rahab's works are commended in James 2:25
1. You could not find two more different persons.
    - a. Abraham was the father of the Jews . . . Rahab was a prostitute.
    - b. Abraham was a godly man . . . Rahab had been a sinful woman, a harlot.
    - c. Abraham was the friend of God . . . Rahab had belonged to the enemies of God.
  2. What did they have in common? Both exercised obedient faith in God.
    - a. Faith without works is a dead faith. 2:20, 26
    - b. That "faith only" the only time this phrase appears in the Bible if used here to teach against the doctrine of "faith only." 22:24
    - c. Bible faith necessitates works . . . Obedience.
- F. **Romans 5:1** – "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."
1. It is surely a tragedy that some religionists extract this verse from the larger context of this inspired book and thus draw the unwarranted conclusion that salvation is on the basis of faith alone.
  2. It is certain that we are justified by faith, but the crucial question is this: What is the quality of the faith considered in this passage?
  3. A careful study of the topic of faith, as viewed in the Book of Romans, and elsewhere in the New Testament for that matter, will reveal that a

sympathetic intellectual and/or emotional attitude toward God, divorced from obedience to His will is of no value in the heavenly scheme of things.

4. A single illustration will suffice to demonstrate this point.
  - a. In Romans 1, Paul commends the saints in Rome and notes that their "faith" is proclaimed throughout the whole world (1:8). But what sort of faith is he talking about?
  - b. **Romans 16:19** – "For your obedience is come abroad unto all men."
  - c. Please observe that while their faith is extolled in Romans 1:8, it is their "obedience" that is stressed in Romans 16:19.
  - d. Clearly, therefore, the type of faith under consideration in this epistle is that which yields to obedience.
  - e. This is further established by noting that the apostle elsewhere in the Roman letter even combines the two terms and speaks of the "obedience of faith" in Romans 1:5 and Romans 16:26.
  - f. Therefore, the faith of which God approves is thus one that issues in obedience . . . And not solely a mental/emotional disposition.

G. Abraham had great faith in God but James points out that Abraham's faith was much more than just belief in the one God—the fruit of Abraham's great faith was in his deeds: **His faith was made complete by what he did—by his actions.**

1. His faith produced his actions, and his actions completed his faith, meaning they "perfected" or "matured" it. Mature and complete believers are produced through perseverance in trials; mature and complete faith is produced through works of obedience to God. Faith and works should not be confused with each other, but neither can they be separated from each other.
2. The **Scriptures** to which James is referring is **Genesis 15:6**, "**Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous.**" James showed that Abraham's righteousness was the basis and reason for all those actions.
3. **Abraham believed God when he obeyed God. That is Biblical faith.**

H. Real living faith is always known by its fruit . . . Real living faith is doing what it knows to be right.

- I. Are we saved by faith or works? The world wants to know.
  1. For centuries the debate has raged over whether the Christian is saved by faith or works.
    - a. The error in this question is the assumption that faith and works are mutually exclusive.
    - b. They are not.
    - c. The apostle Paul tells us that because Abraham believed God justified him.

- d. The apostle James tells us that Abraham was justified when he acted on his belief.
- 2. Works are merely an outgrowth of our faith.
  - a. James challenges his readers to show him faith without works. James then goes on to say that he will demonstrate his faith by his works. (James 2:18)
  - b. A faith that does not work is a dead faith and good for nothing. Even the devils believe in God.
  - c. Our faith does save us, but our faith must be living, active, and working.
- J. **Faith and works should travel side by side, step answering to step, like the legs of men walking. First faith, and then works; and then faith again, and then works again -- until they can scarcely distinguish which is the one and which is the other.** William Booth in "The Founder's Messages to Soldiers," *Christianity Today*, October 5, 1992, p. 48.

**CONCLUSION:**

- A. James 2 is a great chapter for study . . . And a great chapter to apply to Christian living.
- B. **God's Plan for Man's Salvation**