

The Book of James – Chapter 2 (James 2:17,18)

Introduction: We continue with more teaching on the practical application of faith in our lives. The Lord wants us to live a life of faith, and that would include not being respecters of persons. God instructs us not hold anyone in more esteem than another based on their wealth, stature or outward appearance. Then he deals with saving faith or the visible serving faith we exercise that really saves!

Key Verses – James 2:10,17,23

Vs.1 - *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.*

So on the heels of the last verse in chapter one about pure religion and caring for the widows and fatherless we come to having a faith sees all persons the same. James is speaking to fellow Christians, so we would need to look seriously at our relationships among other believers. Do we respect some above others? If we do then we are not living a life of godliness. **Acts 10:34** *Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: Prov.24:23; 28:21* God is against the sinful practice of respecting one above another. **Jude 16**

When we became Christians we became brothers and sisters in the family of God. We should see each other that way because that is the way God sees us. Even in judgment of all matters we are to be impartial. **Deuteronomy 1:17** *Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.* The ground before the foot of the cross is level. We all are equal in God's eyes.

Vs.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;*

Now James gives us a stinging illustration to show what respect of persons looks like. So in walks a man or woman into our midst and they have a gold ring on and dressed very nicely. How do we respond to them as opposed to a poor man coming in wearing vile = meaning dirty, cheap, sinful looking rags. **Luke 16:19** *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:* Who knows the other man's name in this story? Lazarus!

Vs.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:*

In come, two people, and the only thing the congregation sees are the clothes worn and possibly a piece of jewelry. The mind is made up by the Christian who is a respecter of persons to quickly find the best seat in the house for the man in gay clothing. Gay doesn't mean today what it used to mean. Gay clothing here refers to clothing that is fine or showy not vile like the poor mans. The poor man on the other hand is treated like a dog and told to find a place by a footstool and sit on the floor. All our consideration has been by what we have seen not a walk of faith. In fact the poor man may be a brother in Christ and the rich man a wicked sinner. Note also that the poor man is first told to just stand off to the side unless the footstool would do.

Our faith should never have us to act in such a manner to those who come into our meetings. As far as we are concerned all should be treated kindly and equally. The Bible tells us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. We should take the initiative to treat all people equally because that is a living God honouring faith. May we never give someone the cold shoulder because they sat in our seat that we have grown so used to. Believe it or not a simple miscalculation in seating could cause a rumble in many churches today.

Vs.4 - *Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*

There you have it, partial in our hearts toward others. If you make judgments based on sinful, wrong, unbiblical or preconceived ideas you are a respecter and judge of evil thoughts. Respecters of persons! Something we wouldn't tolerate and hope never to be done to us. We place ourselves as a judge over people and the Bible says that that kind of thinking is evil. Who are we to think that we can divide the body of Christ into classes and cliques? True genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ would never pass judgment upon another simply by their outward adornment or appearance! For us to start down the road of being partial in our judgment of others means we may just find ourselves on the receiving end of that same partiality.

Vs.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?*

Listen up! God is about to tell us His reason for treating all without partiality. It is the Lord who has chosen the poor; who have this great faith to salvation. The poor may have little on this side of heaven but are rich in faith toward Jesus Christ. It is not that God would save the poor before or at the expense of the rich because that would be partiality; but that we see the poor so easily embrace the gracious gift of eternal life in Christ, more than the rich in this world's goods. Reference the passage in **Luke 12:13-21** referring to the man who was rich in this world's possessions but poor toward God. **Luke 12:20,21** *But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? 21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.* The Lord here in James makes it abundantly clear that He promises to them that love Him to heirs of the

kingdom of God because of their rich faith in Jesus Christ.

Vs.6 - *But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?*

It is now apparent that James (under inspiration of God) is correcting or rebuking the church at Jerusalem for treating the poor differently than the rich. It was the rich that were bringing Christians before the judges for various things not the poor. **Acts 8:3** *As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.* The rich were the persecutors and oppressors not the poor; but here were those Christians despising the poor because they were poor. We as Christians today must be careful not to treat people differently whether they are rich or poor. Yes, our greatest problem might be to look differently on someone of great wealth or means as undeserving of our love and acceptance as our Christian brother or sister.

Vs.7 - *Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?*

Who are these that would blaspheme that holy name? To blaspheme is to curse or swear against that holy name of Jesus Christ. Yes, the rich man who trusts not in Jesus Christ. That same name upon which you believed they speak evil of. Today the same hateful attitude is seen toward that lovely name; that singular name which is above all names. **Philippians 2:9-11** *Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Vs.8 - *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:*

The bottom line is that the royal law and principle they should be following is to love our neighbours as ourselves. We would do well to heed this principle so noted in **Leviticus 19:18** *Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.* And also in... **Matthew 19:19** *Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* This principle is explained in the parable of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37**. Whether someone is rich or poor has no bearing on how we are to treat them. We would be going against a principle in scripture to not treat someone as we would want to be treated. **Matthew 7:12** *Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets"* Now who is to take the initiative in showing kindness toward others? We are to be the active party and show Christian love to all people.

Vs.9 - *But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.*

The end result of treating people differently because of their stature in life is committing sin. We have broken God's law of loving our neighbour. As Christians this should be the farthest thing from our minds seeing as we are all cut from the same cloth. We are all sinners in need of a Saviour and when we got saved it should not matter whether we have wealth or not.

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

Now we see James turns us toward a good look at our true state without Christ. We are at best lowly, lost sinners. If we only offend in one point of God's law we are guilty of offending in the whole law. **Gal.3:9-11** It seems to be all or nothing no picking and choosing. This reveals for us that we are in desperate need of Jesus Christ and salvation which can only be attained by faith in Christ. The law cannot nor ever could save us as it only served to show what fallen sinners we are. Since Adam's fall there has been no one except Jesus Christ who has kept the law in its entirety. None have obeyed completely and could entrust the salvation of their soul to their own obedience, but only by faith. That exact point is what the following verses shall deal with as James explains true saving faith to us.

Vs.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.*

The problem lies for us in that it doesn't matter which or how many laws we have broken but that we are law breakers. **Exodus 20:13,14** We are transgressors! **Meaning** - we have broken God's law or violated His commands, His rules, and we are sinners. None of us are sinless or can depend upon our own righteousness to save us. **Romans 3:9-23** Since we are law breakers (not of any particular law) we shall incur the penalty of the law as sinners. **Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Vs.12 - *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.*

First we must know what this law of liberty is. If we are speaking about freedom then there is only one thing this law of liberty could be and that is truth. **John 8:31,32** *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* Remember back in chapter 1 verse 25 these words *"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."* The perfect law of liberty is the Holy Bible. The Bible is full of God's commands and laws that man has broken but the Bible also contains the fact that there is a Saviour who is Christ the

Lord. Only through faith in that one Saviour can man be made free!

Vs.13 - *For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

My friend one of the greatest attributes of God is His mercy! That God would not give us what we deserve. God is a God of mercy and so should His children who have been showed that mercy. **Matthew 18:23-35** Can you imagine after what the Lord has done for us that we could not or would not show mercy to another? How can I possibly make a right judgment if I leave no room in my judgment for pity and compassion on others? When we exercise mercy toward others around us, then we can rejoice in the judgment wherewith we judge. What do I mean? Well if we show mercy in our judgments and decisions concerning others then we can rest knowing we are not judging others without a compassionate heart.

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

Now we must learn about saving faith. Paul by inspiration tells us that we are saved by faith and not of works of the law. James will be telling us that saving faith will produce works. These two writers are fighting against each other but back to back. Two different foes are being fought; Paul was saying that faith saves apart from the Law and transforms you; while James is telling us that saving faith will produce good works to accompany salvation. James tells us that those who profess to be saved and there are no accompanying good works attached to that faith then is that man saved. Can an unfruitful faith save anyone? No! Some ref. scriptures – **Rom.4:3-5, 19-22; Gal.2:16; 3:1-3,8-13:**

Vs.15 - *If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,*

James will now give us an illustration of real living faith and its accompanying works. The illustration is about a brother or sister (meaning Christians) who is in desperate need. In this case before us they are without food, clothes and other necessary basics of life.

Vs.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?*

Imagine someone in your sphere of influence and they are in need of these things and your response is “May the peace of God go with you and be filled and warm.” Where does the supply of those basic needs come from? Do they just drop out of the sky? Certainly God would have His children fed and clothed. God expects fellow believers to care for each other and meet those needs in the body of Christ. How can we say we care and at the same time, be that aware

of a need amongst fellow believers and then not meet that need? That is hypocrisy! We are not showing Christian love and care for fellow believers. Those words are hollow and empty that speak peace and care, but do not meet the need right before their eyes. How are your words helping these desperate people? What do they profit anyone if they are not backed up by works, acts of love? **1John 3:17,18**

Vs.17 - *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*

This illustration shows us what dead faith looks like. You can say I have faith but that same faith should be seen in its fruit. If that professed faith has nothing accompanying it like good works and obedience then it is a dead faith. It is a lonely faith meaning a living faith would be joined with its works. A dead faith finds itself alone with no accompanying works; nothing to show for its proud profession. It is dead!

Vs.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.*

“...shew thee my faith...” That faith that believes in Jesus Christ as Saviour: a life changing faith! **2Cor.5:17** It could not be made any clearer than what we read in this verse. Here we have two men and one says to the other “You say you have faith and I have works; well than show me your faith without any works and I will show you my faith by the works you see in my life.” I wonder how much you can fake being a Christian. It seems after a while, trying to be something you are not will become very tiring and lose its appeal. What non-Christian loves reading the Bible, being in church meetings, praying for others and sharing their faith? How many non-Christians love Christians?

We must see that faith and works go together like a couple walking arm and arm. Better yet look at faith and works as your two legs. Each one is separate from the other but they go together in perfect harmony. One step – faith, next step – works; and there you go walking in your Christian life. Faith, works, faith, works, faith, works...! Without works faith is dead like a body without life.

Vs.19 - *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

Just promoting or agreeing with a certain Bible doctrine does not save anyone. If there is one thing that would nail down a person’s sincere belief the writer chooses it. A person believes there is one God that is a good thing to believe. But, even that basic and most important doctrine of believing in one God is not so great that it alone could save anyone. The verse tells us that even the devils believe there is one God and tremble. The devils know and fear Almighty God but they are not saved and their works show they do not believe unto salvation.

Vs.20 - *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*

Will you understand completely and genuinely that a professed faith in Christ without following works in that life is dead? It is dead faith! What better illustration is to follow in the next verse as we look at Abraham? If we fail to see the fruit of a living and saving faith then we are vain, empty, and fruitless in our understanding.

Vs.21 - *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?*

We find in scripture **Rom.4:3; Gen.20:1-22** how Abraham and his son Isaac went up to Mt. Moriah to worship. The sacrifice was to be Isaac. Abraham did what he was told to do. He believed God when he raised that knife above his head to slay his own son. Abraham believed God would provide Himself a lamb; and that Isaac would be raised up if he had died. It was obedience (visible works) toward God that revealed or showed Abraham's faith in God. What value is there in a professed faith in God that when inspected comes up empty of any signs of trusting obedient works.

Vs.22 - *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*

James tells us it should be obvious by the life of Abraham that his faith brought about works in his life; revealing to anyone who would care to look, that Abraham's faith was made complete by the works that followed after. **Hebrews 11:17** *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,*

Vs.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.*

Genesis 15:6 tells us that Abraham believed God and it was counted as righteousness to him. There are several places in scripture where God refers to Abraham as His friend.

2Chronicles 20:7 *Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? Isaiah 41:8* *But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.* Would you like to called a friend of God?

Vs.24 - *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

So, from what we have seen and learned it should be obvious to us that a man is not justified by faith alone, without, that faith revealing some works in their life. Faith alone saves but a saving faith will be accompanied by works. In order for a man to be justified by faith which is unseen but God knows, it will be natural for that unseen faith in the heart to be seen by the works of an individual.

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

We see also in **Hebrews 11:31** *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.* **Joshua 2** The story of Rahab who acted on her faith or belief in the God of the Hebrews. Her works indicating her faith and belief in this God of the Jews saved her entire house. **Joshua 6:14-25** God saw inside her heart what man saw in her works.

Vs.26 - *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

I could go back over all illustrations and points already made but the hope is that this last illustration would be enough for us to understand. **Illus:** If you see a body sitting in a chair you can come to the conclusion that there is a body there but is it alive? The only way to tell is to see if it moves or shows signs of life. But, this body has no spirit so it has no life. It is a body but a dead one. So the same with faith that is without works. It is professed and proclaimed and so God alone could tell if there is a true saving faith in the person's heart; but, if a professed faith has no works accompanying it then it is a dead faith and cannot save. Works are the spirit and life of faith!

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