

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

James 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;

James 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:

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

I had to group these verses together. The first verse doesn't make sense without the following verses. The key is that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is not meant to be for just a certain group of people—it is available to everyone. We are not to show partiality in deciding with whom we will share the gospel. We are supposed to realize that God is just as interested in the soul of the poor man as the rich man. When we show partiality to the person of wealth, position and power (or for whatever reason), we are always motivated by “what’s in it for me” whether we want to admit it or not. I like the way the New Living Translation puts it in verse 4, “doesn’t this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives?”

James 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?

My paraphrase—Listen; pay attention; think about it. Hasn't God chosen those who are considered poor in this world to be rich in faith, to be the ones that will trust in Him in spite of the circumstances, to inherit the kingdom of love, truth, peace and prosperity (God's kingdom) which He has promised to those that love Him?

I think that one of the key phrases here is “to them that love Him.” Those who truly love God will show it by how they live their lives. There will be evidence of that love in their lives.

It's always interesting to note the differences in what we consider important and what God considers important. We judge people or make assessments about people based on their fame and fortune and often consider them to be blessed of God when they have much. God on the other hand reminds us that true riches are to be laid up in heaven and not on this earth.

Matt. 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

Matt. 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

When Jesus was here, He obviously spent much more time with the “lower” class peoples than He did with the upper classes. They were the ones who were well aware of their needs. Those who are rich are less likely to recognize their needs or admit their needs. It actually makes me realize that God was very good to me in not allowing me to be born into a wealthy family. Those with wealth

more easily get entrapped into keeping up appearances and not letting their guard down or admitting their needs.

Again, you can't get away from the fact that God "chose" those who would be rich in faith. If you try to isolate this verse, or any verse, you can come up with some real problems in understanding. When I take the whole scripture in context, I have no problem in understanding. This choosing is made according to His will and is based on His foreknowledge.

2Pet. 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Rom. 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (See journal on Romans.)

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

Mankind as a whole looks down on the poor and is quick to judge them and criticize them. They are not the ones who are oppressive in their behavior to others. They are not the ones who are quick to take you to court for a perceived injustice. It is the rich who are quick to protect their position of power and influence through oppression, or the courts, or

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

It is the rich who more readily blaspheme (dishonor, slander, speak evil of) the name of Jesus Christ, the one from whom you get your name "Christian."

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

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

"fulfils" - keeps, accomplishes, performs

"royal" - befitting the king

"according to the scripture" – The scripture to these believers refers to the Old Testament.

"neighbor" – fellowman, countryman, friend

My paraphrase – If you can keep the command of the law (Lev 19:18) in scripture to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself, you are doing well. (That means that you are showing absolutely no partiality in your treatment of individuals. It usually means that you would only show kindness, helpfulness, patience, etc. in dealing with others.) But if you show partiality in your dealings with others, you are sinning, and the law condemns you as transgressors (violators, breakers) of the law.

Lev. 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.

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

This is a hard truth for many to accept. Anyone who breaks the law at any point becomes a transgressor, a sinner. It doesn't matter if it is one of the little points of the law or one of the major points of the law. Sin is sin. As a society, we have categorized things, i.e., little white lies vs. big lies—little sins vs. big sins. Of course, the Lord got right to the heart of things in the Sermon on the Mount when He made us recognize that the intent of our heart makes us just as guilty as the physical commission of a sin.

James 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.**

James is emphasizing his point. Sin is sin in the eyes of God. God is the "he that said." When you transgress the law, you are guilty of sin.

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

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

Who are those "judged by the law of liberty?" I believe they are those who have trusted Jesus as Savior.

John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.."

John 8:36, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

I Cor 7:22, "For he that is called in the Lord, *being* a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, *being* free, is Christ's servant."

So, whatever we say or do should be done as befits a believer, a follower of Jesus. We should be merciful. If we judge others without being merciful, we will be judged without mercy.

"Mercy rejoiceth against judgment" – As believers, though we deserve judgment, God has shown us mercy. That mercy is cause for rejoicing. Because we understand our position before God, we should be quick to respond in kind to others and leave all judgment to God.

This has been a learning thing for me. I was always quick to judge and ready to exact the harshest punishment for some of the more notorious criminals in particular. I remember making bold statements about what I would do to anyone who harmed any of my children in particular. I still have to fight this tendency. The Spirit has really spoken to my heart regarding my attitude toward these people. (I think most recently of the guy who killed his family in California and the mother who drowned all of her children.) I don't understand these people—but God is just as concerned about their soul as He is mine. My prayer should be for them to come to know the Lord through some miracle and to leave all judgment to God. He is the One who has established the authorities over us. May His will be done, but Lord, please keep me cognizant of the fact that I am a

sinner no less than they. I am just a sinner saved by grace!! Thank You for Your wonderful mercy!

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

This is a verse that causes me much concern regarding certain members of my family. I think James is trying to get his audience to think about the kind of faith they have. We can say that we believe or have faith in something, but if we don't act on it, is it really faith? If we say we have faith that a chair can hold us up, but refuse to sit down in it---is that faith? If we say that we have faith in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, but our lives show no evidence of that faith---is it real? The more I've thought about it, the more it concerns me. A person can "backslide" or fall into sin, but I think that even then that person will feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit in his/her life regarding that way of life (even if they choose to ignore it for a time, but they won't ignore it forever and/or God will chasten him—**Heb 12:6-7**). Bottom line, I don't know what goes on in the heart of my loved ones. This verse is one of those that motivates me to send letters, tapes, etc.

Heb. 12:6-7 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

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

James goes on to emphasize his point. Our words of encouragement and support mean nothing to those in need without actions to back them up. If everyone was "sorry" about what happened at the World Trade Centers, but no one acted by pitching in to help in the rescue efforts, their words would have been empty—without meaning—and no one would have been rescued and New York would never get repaired. People in need won't find relief until someone acts to provide that relief.

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

Now James makes his statement bluntly—Faith without works is dead; it is not real. The word for "dead" in the Greek "nekros" means "dead." It is not alive; it is good for nothing. People shy away from this verse. They like to lean on the verse that says that salvation is by grace alone.

That is true. But it is also true that our actions, the way we live, prove our faith. Why can't we accept the whole word of God instead of just part of it. I truly believe that has been one of Satan's most effective tools. So much division has been created in the "church" because of the desire of men to leave out or ignore parts of scripture that they don't like. We like the teaching of grace, but we don't want to actually feel the responsibility of living in a way that proves it. Or, on the other hand, we feel like we must work to earn our salvation instead of just

relying on the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Why not just realize that the truth is that the Bible teaches salvation by grace through faith that is proved by how we live.

James 2:19 *Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

James' audience is comfortable because they believe that there is only one God. That's true, and that's wonderful. But the fact is that the "devils" (demons, evil spirits) also believe in the one God (know that He exists and who He is) and this knowledge makes them "tremble" (shiver, shudder, bristle or chill). This knowledge doesn't bring them comfort; it scares them.

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

My paraphrase—Don't you know, stupid/foolish man, that faith that isn't reflected by any evidence in your life is just empty words; it's useless. (11/05) Rich Mullins states this truth cleverly in one of his songs, "Faith without works is like a screen door on a submarine."

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

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

James 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.*

His audience at that time was very proud of the fact that they were children of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. So James uses Abraham as a prime proof that faith and works go hand in hand. Abraham was justified (declared righteous) before God because of his act of obedience in offering his son Isaac on the altar. It wouldn't have been enough if he had just said in his heart, "Lord, you know I am willing, but you told me that you were going to make me a great nation through Isaac. So, I know you don't really mean that you want me to actually offer Isaac up to you. You just want to know that I am willing." That would never have resulted in Abraham being justified before God. It was his action that proved his faith.

Vs 23 is referencing **Genesis 15:6**—"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

God already knew Abraham's heart. He had already credited Abraham with faith that acts because He is God. But He also put this example from Abraham's life in the scripture as a proof text to those of us who can't see into the heart—to emphasize the importance of obedience. So that scripture was fulfilled when Abraham obeyed God in chapter 22. His actions placed him on a special relationship level with God; he was God's friend.

2Chr. 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?*

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

I don't believe James is trying to change or take away from the truth of Ephesians 2:8-9 with this statement.

Eph. 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Taken in context with the whole of what he has been saying, he is just trying to make a statement regarding "true faith." That is something that I always warn my ladies about in the Foundations of Faith classes. I make sure that they know to test themselves regarding the decision they have made. Was it real, or was it just a movement in response to an emotion of the moment. If it was real, they will see a change in their lives. You can't be the "temple of the Holy Spirit" and live in sin without feeling His conviction. It is grace alone as the gift of God that saves, but there will be actions to support a faith that is real. It seems so clear to me. Someone who truly realizes what it took for Jesus to become their sin on the cross and decides to accept that sacrifice for salvation WILL SHOW IT in their life because of their love and gratitude to the Savior. Even pagans know how to show their gratitude. Just look at what is happening all around us right now in the light of current events.

I liked Mark Hitchcock's definition for "justified"—vindicated by visible evidence.

James 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?

James is bending over backwards to make his point from the scriptures (which to them was the OT). Rahab was protected because of her actions in protecting the spies who had come to check out Jericho. If she had not protected the spies, she would have been destroyed along with everyone else. Her actions proved her heart and the truth of her declaration of faith in God.

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

James gives his final example—The body without the *spirit* (Greek "pneuma"—wind, spirit, breath, the rational soul) is dead. Without the life force, the body does not function. In the same way, faith without works is dead. Faith that doesn't result in actions that are obedient to God and show our love and gratitude for the provider of our salvation is dead, useless, empty. It is just not real faith.

(5/07) Another applicable quote from the Wiersbe bible conference notes follows. Do you believe in justification by faith? More people excuse themselves from responsibility by using prayer. There are two kinds of faith:

1. Dead faith – which is talk, talk, talk, but no walk, walk, walk.
Many people can make a confession, but there is no change. Their life stays the same.
2. Living faith

Faith is not the means of our salvation; it is only the instrument. Your faith is only as good as the object of your faith. If the object is not right, you have only superstition. Abraham was saved because he believed God. Faith and works are not enemies; they are friends. Those people with dead faith have no works; they just talk about it. We are not saved by works; we are saved through a faith that is evidenced by our works.