



# Book of James

## Chapter 2

*Theme: God tests faith by attitude and action in  
respect of persons; God tests faith by good  
works*

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**Theme:** God tests faith by attitude and action in respect of persons; God tests faith by good works

### **The Most Painful Sin**

What sin has probably caused the more pain than any other?

Gossip! It is, in its most formal form, a violation of Ex 20:16. However, in its more subtle forms, gossip is probably accountable for more personal pain and suffering than most of us have any appreciation of. Gossip is a form of betrayal!

Common, casual, yet hurtful beyond our reckoning. Quietly, behind the flurry of daily priorities, its venom does its silent work, undermining confidences, betraying relationships, spreading unseen injustices... James focuses on the tongue as a most critical measure of spiritual maturity:

1: 26: If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain.

*chalinagoeo* to bridle, hold in check, restrain; keep a tight rein on.

The tongue is a ready and willing instrument to talk about our neighbor behind his back. (Cf. Rom 1:30; 2 Cor 12:20; James 4:11)

### **The “Christian” Approach:**

“I don’t want to gossip. However, in order that you might pray more specifically for \_\_\_\_\_, let me tell you the latest...”

What is a true friendship?

One that doesn’t require explanations.

One that gives the benefit of the doubt.

One that is loyal and shuns any form of betrayal.

[I, of course, know that none of *you* are guilty of such things; but these suggestions are offered to help you counsel your needy friends...] – Missler.

**McGee Introduction:** In the first thirteen verses of this chapter, James is going to deal with how we are to treat people in the different strata of society. How do you treat the rich man? How do you treat the poor man? How do you treat the average man whom you meet today? This section deals with God’s war on poverty and, interestingly enough, also God’s war on riches. This is God’s war on poverty *and* riches. His war on poverty is a little different from that of our government; no matter which political party has been in office, neither the federal nor the state governments have been able to deal successfully with this problem.

Both poverty and riches can be a curse. Part of the curse on the human race is poverty and riches. The writer in the Book of Proverbs says, “... give me neither poverty nor riches ...” (Prov. 30:8). The most difficult people to reach are those who are the most poverty-stricken and those who are the richest; it seems to be almost impossible to reach either class with the Word of God.

The real problem is actually the imbalance of wealth in the world. The problem today is not between political parties, and it is not even between the races. The problem in the

world is the imbalance of wealth. Take for example the nation of India where it is estimated there will soon be a population of one billion. There is great famine and starvation in that land; they starve by the thousands over there. Contrast that with the luxury and abundance which the wealthy have today. God goes after this problem in this epistle. He is on the side of the poor—I'm very, delighted to say that. After all, when the Lord Jesus came into the world, He wasn't a rich man's boy; He wasn't born with a silver spoon in His mouth. He was born in poverty. He was born in a borrowed stable. He had to borrow loaves and fishes from a little lad to feed the crowd. He spoke from a borrowed boat. He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (see Matt. 8:20). He had to borrow a coin to illustrate a truth. He borrowed a donkey to ride into Jerusalem. He borrowed a room to celebrate the Passover. He died on a borrowed cross—it belonged to Barabbas, not to Him. They put Him in a borrowed tomb—it belonged to Joseph of Arimathaea.

When I was in college, we had a preacher who came and talked about "the blessings of poverty." Now I was a poor boy, and I mean *poor*, my friend. I was going to school on borrowed money and was working full time. That man spoke every morning in chapel, and I was told that he got \$15,000 a year (that was back in the days when a dollar was worth a dollar). It was a lot of money for a preacher in that day. You know, what he had to say just ran off my mind like water off a duck's back—he had no message for me. The blessings of poverty? I just happen to know, since I was born that way and haven't gotten too far from it yet, that there are no blessings in poverty. Poverty is a curse, and part of the curse which Christ bore was poverty.

Riches can also be a curse, as James will show in this epistle. Paul said, "For the love of money is the root of all evil ..." (1 Tim. 6:10). Paul and James certainly agree here. You can spend your money for the wrong items. You can deposit your money in the wrong bank. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal" (Matt. 6:19). All the banks are telling us where to put our money, but God says, in effect, "I've got a bank, and I will keep investments up there for you." James will be harsh with the rich, as we will see in chapter 5. Proverbs 30:8 should be the philosophy of every Christian: "Give me neither poverty nor riches."

What is God's solution to the problem of poverty? It is not to rob the rich in order to take care of the indigent, the lazy, the indolent, the drones, the loafers, the sluggards, and the laggards. On the other hand, God would never destroy the dignity and the self-respect and the integrity and the honor of the poor by placing them on charity. God's war on poverty and riches does not march under the banner of the dollar where millions are appropriated for relief. And it is not aimed primarily at the head or at the stomach, but at the heart. It is a war against class. James is talking about distinctions and divisions among believers which have been brought about by money.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 1:27). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

### **Barnes' Analysis of the Chapter.**

This chapter is evidently made up of three parts, or three subjects are discussed:-

**I.** The duty of impartiality in the treatment of others, verses 1-9. There was to be no favouritism on account of rank, birth, wealth, or apparel. The *case* to which the apostle refers for an illustration of this, is that where two persons should come into an assembly of Christian worshippers, one elegantly dressed, and the other meanly clad, and they should show special favour to the former, and should assign to the latter a more humble place. The *reasons* which the apostle assigns why they should not do this are,

(\*) that God has chosen the poor for his own people, having selected *his* friends mainly from them;

(\*) because rich men in fact oppressed them, and showed that they were worthy of no special regard;

(\*) because they were often found among revilers, and in fact despised their religion; and

(\*) because the law required that they should love their neighbours as themselves, and if they did this, it was all that was demanded; that is, that the love of the *man* was not to be set aside by the love of splendid apparel.

**II.** The duty of yielding obedience to the *whole* law in order to have evidence of true religion, verses 10-13. This subject seems to have been introduced in accordance with the general principles and aims of James, (James 1:1, the Introduction) that religion consists in obeying the law of God, and that there can be none when this is not done. It is not improbable that, among those to whom he wrote, there were some who denied this, or who had embraced some views of religion which led them to doubt it. He therefore enforces the duty by the following considerations:

(1.) That if a man should obey every part of the law, and yet be guilty of offending in one point, he was in fact guilty of all; for he showed that he had no genuine principle of obedience, and was guilty of violating the law as a whole, James 2:10.

(2.) Every part of the law rests on the same authority, and one part, therefore, is as binding as another. The same God that has forbidden murder, has also forbidden adultery; and he who does the one as really violates the law as he who does the other, James 2:11.

(3.) The judgment is before us, and we shall be tried on impartial principles, not with reference to obeying one part of the law, but with reference to its whole claim; and we should so act as becomes those who expect to be judged by the whole law, or on the question whether we have conformed to every part of it, James 2:12-13.

**III.** The subject of justification, showing that *works* are necessary in order that a man may be justified, or esteemed righteous before God, James 2:14-26. For a general view of the design of this part of the epistle, James 5:1, Introduction to Chapter 5. The object here is to show that *in fact* no one can be regarded as truly righteous before God who does not lead an upright life; and that if a man professes to have faith, and has not works, he cannot be justified; or that if he have *real* faith, it will be shown by his works. If it is *not* shown by works corresponding to its nature, it will be certain that there is no true religion, or that his professed faith is worth nothing. The "stand point" from which James views the subject, is not that faith is unnecessary or worthless, or that a man is not justified by faith rather than by his own works, in the sense of its being the ground of acceptance with God; or, in other words, the place where the apostle takes his position, and which is the point from which he views the subject, is not *before* a man is justified, to

inquire in what way he *may* be accepted of God, but it is *after* the act of justification by faith, to show that if faith does not lead to good works it is "dead," or is of no value; and that in fact, therefore, the evidence of justification is to be found in good living, and that when this is not manifest, all a man's professed religion is worth nothing. In doing this, he

(\*) makes the general statement, by a pointed interrogatory, that faith cannot profit, that is, cannot *save* a man, unless there be also works, James 2:14. He then

(\*) appeals, for an illustration, to the case of one who is hungry or naked, and asks what mere *faith* could do in his case, if it were not accompanied with proper acts of benevolence, James 2:15-17. He then,

(\*) by a strong supposable case, says that real faith will be evinced *by* works, or that works are the proper evidence of its existence, James 2:18. He then

(\*) shows that there is a kind of faith which even the devils have on one of the most important doctrines of religion, and which can be of no value; showing that it cannot be by *mere* faith, irrespective of the question of what sort the faith is, that a man is to be saved, James 2:19. He then

(\*) appeals to the case of Abraham, showing that *in fact* works performed an important part in his acceptance with God; or that if it had not been for his works—that is, if there no evidence that he was justified, or that his works were the proper *carrying out* or *fulfilment* of his faith, James 2:20-24. He then

(\*) shows that the same thing was true of another case recorded in the Old Testament—that of Rahab, (James 2:25;) and then observes, (James 2:26,) that faith without works would have no more claim to being true religion than a dead body, without a soul, would be regarded as a living man. <sup>2</sup>

### **James 2:1**

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

Notice that the half-brother of the Lord uses here His full title. I hold the view that James was in a much better position to speak of the deity of Jesus Christ than some arrogant theologians who quite distant from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century—in thought, geography, time, and spirit.

Eusebius's account of James's martyrdom gives us a vivid example of impartiality. James was held in such high regard as one who "does not respect persons" that when the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem were alarmed by the numbers who were believing in Jesus as the Christ, they appealed to James to make a speech to calm the crowd! When they presented James to the crowd, the speech he gave was hardly what they wanted, for he declared Jesus to be the Christ in such strong terms that many became believers then. According to the account in Eusebius, it was this incident that led to James's death. The authorities were so angered by his speech that they cast him to the ground and stoned him to death—while he prayed to God to forgive them.

[The chapter division between 1:27 and 2:1 disguises the linkage between "not showing favoritism" and "being polluted by the world."]

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<sup>2</sup> Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

The way we behave toward people indicates what we *really* believe about God! 1 John 4:20.

Nothing reveals more clearly the selfishness of the human heart than the way in which we are inclined to the wealthy and influential, while neglecting the poor and ignorant.

We have pyramid-climbers in churches as well as in politics, industry, and society (James 3:1).<sup>3</sup>

### **Examples...**

Proverbs 30:8 “... give me neither poverty nor riches...”

Rudyard Kipling was right, regarding success and failure: “Treat both those imposters the same.” [His poem, *If*]

There is no place for vulgar favoritism within the Body of Christ. Peter also learned that lesson: Acts 10:38. James himself also voiced it in Acts 15.

**Dake:** [have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons] Do not have the faith of Christ with partiality. Do not prefer the rich merely because of riches, and not for their moral, spiritual, and public usefulness (James 2:1-4).<sup>4</sup>

**McGee:** “*Have* not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” should be “*Hold* not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice that James is His half brother according to the flesh, but he gives Him here the full name, “our Lord Jesus Christ.” And he calls Him “the Lord of glory.” Here is a strong assertion of the deity of Christ. I know of no one who was in a better position to determine the deity of Christ than a younger brother of the Lord Jesus who was brought up in the same home with Him. Frankly, I think James is in a better position to speak on the deity of Christ than some theologian sitting in a swivel chair in a musty library in New York City, removed from the reality of even his own day. Such a man is really far removed from the reality of the first century and the home in which Jesus was raised. Therefore, I go along with James, if you don’t mind. He is the “Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

What James is telling us here is not to profess faith in Christ and at the same time be a spiritual snob. Don’t join some little clique in the church. *All* believers are brethren in the body of Christ, whatever their denomination. There is a fellowship of believers; friendship should be over them as a banner. James is addressing the total community of believers—the rich, the poor, the common people, the high, the low, the bond and free, the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the barbarian, male and female. They are all *one* when they are in the body of Christ. There is a brotherhood within the body of believers, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the common denominator. Friendship and fellowship are the legal tender among believers.

James says, “Don’t hold your faith with respect of persons.” If you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and another person belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, he is your brother. Furthermore, if a sinner comes into your assembly or you otherwise come into contact with him, remember that he is a human being for whom Christ died. He stands at the foot of the cross, just as you stand at the foot of the cross.

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<sup>3</sup> Chuck Missler, Study Notes Book of James, khouse.org

<sup>4</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake’s Study Bible

The Old Testament taught Israel not to regard the person of the rich or of the poor. God, in the Mosaic system, cautioned: “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour” (Lev. 19:15). Simon Peter learned this lesson at Joppa when God let down from heaven the sheet full of unclean animals and commanded him to eat of them. Peter concluded from that experience, “. . . Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).

James uses a stinging illustration to make his point:<sup>5</sup>

**Lord of Glory:** James used strong words to refer to Jesus Christ: The Lord of glory. Moffatt comments: “The Christian religion [is here called] more explicitly belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the divine Glory – a striking term for Christ as the full manifestation of the divine presence and majesty. The Jews called this the *shekinah*.” This is especially significant because James is widely (and properly) regarded as one of the first letters of the New Testament written (perhaps somewhere between A.D. 44 and 48). This means that the *earliest* Christians considered Jesus to be God, and said so in strong, unmistakable words.<sup>6</sup>

**Clarke: My brethren, have not**—This verse should be read interrogatively: My brethren, do ye not make profession of the faith or religion of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with acceptance of persons? That is, preferring the rich to the poor merely because of their riches, and not on account of any moral excellence, personal piety, or public usefulness.<sup>7</sup>

**Barnes: Have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.** *Faith* is the distinguishing thing in the Christian religion, for it is this by which man is justified, and hence it comes to be put for religion itself. 1 Timothy 3:9. The meaning here is, "Do not hold such views of the religion of Christ, as to lead you to manifest partiality to others on account of their difference of rank or outward circumstances."

**Barnes:** *With respect of persons.* That is, you are not to show respect of persons, or to evince partiality to others on account of their rank, wealth, apparel, etc. Compare Proverbs 24:23; 28:21; Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:17; Deuteronomy 10:17; 2Ch 19:7; *Psalms* 40:4. Acts 10:34; and Romans 2:11 to see the subject explained.

**LAN:** In this 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 (James 2:19). You must commit your mind and heart to Christ. (2) Right actions are the natural by-products of true faith. A genuine Christian will have a changed life (James 2:18). (3) Faith without good deeds doesn't do anybody any good—it is useless (James 2:14-17). James's teachings are consistent with Paul's teaching that we

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<sup>5</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/5902.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

receive salvation by faith alone. Paul emphasizes the purpose of faith—to bring salvation. James emphasizes the results of faith—a changed life.<sup>8</sup>

In Palestine, as in most of the empire, the rich were oppressing the poor (2:6–7). But the temptation to make rich converts or inquirers feel welcome at the expense of the poor was immoral (2:4). The language of impartiality was normally applied especially to legal settings, but because synagogues served both as houses of prayer and as community courts, this predominantly legal image naturally applies to any gatherings there.<sup>9</sup>

**Spurgeon:** The man is more than his clothes. A saint in vile raiment is not vile, neither is a wicked man honorable because of his goodly apparel.

**ESV: 1–13** The Sin of Partiality. The problem of the poor and the rich, already emphasized in 1:9–11, 27, now comes to center stage with this warning about discriminating against the poor in favor of the wealthy in the Christian assembly.

James is again writing of a practical application of God's Word in the lives of the faithful. It is a natural and selfish characteristic of the world to devalue the lives of others. Your life has no value to Satan, and no value in the world over which he exercises his rebellion. Satan does not experience agape love, and likewise, neither does the world. Consequently, we should not be surprised when we see the atrocious acts of godless men upon one another.

One very specific sin that creeps into the lives of Christians is that which James refers to as a lack of respect for other persons. One only need observe the characteristics of most individual congregations to find a very narrow social strata represented by its members. Prejudice and its inherent devaluing of others is a characteristic of this wicked world, and is prevalent within the body of Christ.

How did Jesus relate to the different social classes? We see in His life that there were no social classes to Christ. He saw all people as prized treasures of God's creation (Matt. 5), lost people in need of salvation. The Holy Spirit is not the author of prejudice and ignorance. Consequently, such characteristics have no place in the life of a faithful believer.

James states that a true love and respect for all persons has a component of faith involved. We love because God loves, not because of the worthiness of the individual to be loved. This may be one of the most difficult battles for the Christian to deal with, as we regularly ignore the homeless, thinking only of our own wants and desires. We avoid contact with those who are not like ourselves, or in our own ignorance, think that any culture that is not found in our own back yards is somehow of lesser value.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Life Application Notes

synagogues \***Synagogues.** Assembly places used by Jewish people for public prayer, Scripture readings and community meetings.

<sup>9</sup>Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 2:1). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

## **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;**

**[assembly]** Greek: *sunagoge* (GSN-4864). Translated assembly (James 2:2); congregation (Acts 13:43); and synagogue 55 times (Mark 1:21).

**Clarke:** Into the synagogue. It appears from this that the apostle is addressing Jews who frequented their synagogues, and carried on their worship there and judicial proceedings, as the Jews were accustomed to do. Our word assembly does not express the original; and we cannot suppose that these synagogues were at this time occupied with Christian worship, but that the Christian Jews continued to frequent them for the purpose of hearing the law and the prophets read, as they had formerly done, previously to their conversion to the Christian faith. But St. James may refer here to proceedings in a court of justice.

**[gold ring]** Greek: *chrusodaktulios* (GSN-5554), gold-ringed. Only appears here. The ring is not condemned; it was customary for men and women to wear rings and other ornaments. See Outward Adorning.

**Clarke: With a gold ring, in goodly apparel**—The ring on the finger and the splendid garb were proofs of the man's opulence; and his ring and his coat, not his worth, moral good qualities, or the righteousness of his cause, procured him the respect of which St. James speaks.

**[goodly]** Greek: *lampros* (GSN-2986), bright; brilliant; radiant; shining. Translated goodly (James 2:2; Rev. 18:14); bright (Acts 10:30; Rev. 22:16); white (Rev. 15:6; Rev. 19:8); clear (Rev. 22:1); gay (James 2:3); and gorgeous (Luke 23:11), so that we have clothing of angels, men in heaven, and men on earth described. Neither the gold ring nor the bright clothing is condemned; only partiality toward those who wear them.

**[apparel]** Greek: *esthes* (GSN-2066). Translated apparel (James 2:2; Acts 1:10; Acts 12:21); raiment (James 2:2); clothing (James 2:3; Acts 10:30); and robe (Luke 23:11).

**[come in also a poor man in vile raiment]** Jewish petty courts were held in local synagogues (note, Mark 1:21). The case here is no doubt of a judicial kind, not a Christian or Jewish religious service. Where there are two men, one rich and one poor, the master of the synagogue, or the judge, is not to pay particular attention to the rich man and neglect the poor one. As plaintiff and defendant, they are equal in the eye of justice and should be considered so by an impartial judge.

**Clarke: There come in also a poor man**—In ancient times petty courts of judicature were held in the synagogues, as Vitringa has sufficiently proved, *De Vet. Syn.* l. 3, p. 1, c. 11; and it is probable that the case here adduced was one of a judicial kind, where, of the two parties, one was rich and the other poor; and the master or ruler of the synagogue,

or he who presided in this court, paid particular deference to the rich man, and neglected the poor man; though, as plaintiff and defendant, they were equal in the eye of justice, and should have been considered so by an impartial judge.

**LAN: 1-7** James condemns acts of favoritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures. The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive life-style at our expense. In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. 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.

The issue addressed is then illustrated. The illustration’s hypothetical nature, evident in the Greek “if clause,” is shown with the word **suppose**. The specific situation is then presented. A **gold**-fingered and brilliantly clothed man comes **into** the **meeting** place, here designated as a synagogue which emphasizes the Jewish character of both the epistle and this scene. A **poor man** in dirty **clothes** also enters. The word **shabby** (*rypara*, “dirty” or “vile”) is found only here and in Revelation 22:11. (Cf. the word *ryparian*, “moral filth,” which James used in 1:21.) **Special attention** (lit., “to gaze upon”) and preferential seating is given to the rich man, and standing room only or an inferior seat **on the floor** (lit., “under my footstool”) is afforded the **poor man**.<sup>11</sup>

**JNTC: Your synagogue.** This is a Messianic synagogue, a congregation of believers in Yeshua, predominantly Jewish, expressing their New Covenant faith in a way retaining most or all of the prayers, customs and style of non-Messianic synagogues. The word in Greek is “*sunagôgê*”; it appears 57 times? in the New Testament. Fifty-six times it refers to a Jewish place of congregational assembly and is translated “synagogue” in virtually all English versions. Yet in the present verse KJV and the Revised Standard Version render it “assembly,” and other versions translate it by “church,” “meeting,” “place of worship” and other avoidances of the word “synagogue.” This reflects the translators’ unwillingness to acknowledge the Jewishness of New Covenant faith and the overall antisemitic bias that has infected Christianity over the centuries (see Ro 10:4&N). The New Jerusalem Bible prepared by Roman Catholics does use the word “synagogue,” but adds in a note, “James is writing to Jewish Christians; it is possible that they may even have still been attending Jewish synagogues, or it may be his word for the Christian ‘assembly’ for liturgical services.” “Even ... still ... attending Jewish synagogues”—how backward of them! And how backward of Sha’ul, who made it his “usual practice” to do so (Ac 17:2)!

Ya’akov is talking neither about a Christian church service nor a gathering of Jewish nonbelievers but a Messianic synagogue. He would not refer to “**your synagogue**” and assume his readers were in charge of seating visitors if the synagogue was not controlled

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<sup>11</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:2–3). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

by the Messianic Jews. There is no reason why “synagogue,” with its unmistakably Jewish connotation, should have been “his word for the Christian ‘assembly’ ” in general, since the term the New Testament uses 112 times? for that is “*ekklêsia*” (usually rendered “church” in other versions; see Mt 16:18N); Ya’akov himself employs it at 5:14. The idea that this synagogue was Messianic simply did not occur to the Jerusalem Bible note-writer. Rendering *sunagôgê* “assembly” or “church” instead of “synagogue” robs Messianic Jews of their identity.

This verse establishes a solid New Testament basis for modern-day Messianic synagogues, provided they do not exclude Gentile believers. To do so would “raise the middle wall of partition” once again, in violation of Ep 2:11–16&NN. A Messianic synagogue, while committed to preserving and developing a Jewish rather than a Gentile mode of expressing New Covenant faith, must be open to participation by believing Jews and Gentiles alike.<sup>12</sup>

### **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:**

You can’t profess faith in Christ and at the same time be a spiritual snob. Watch out for cliques in church; watch out for divisions and stratification: The rich, the poor; the common, the high and the low, the bond and free, the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the barbarian, the male and female...the premillennial and amillennial; the pre-trib and post-trib... we are all *one* in Christ.

Jesus broke down the wall that separated the Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22) Friendship and fellowship are the legal tender among believers. 1 Corinthians 1:26-27.

**Clarke:** **Sit here under my footstool**—Thus evidently prejudging the cause, and giving the poor man to see that he was to expect no impartial administration of justice in his cause.

**Barnes:** *Or sit here under my footstool.* Perhaps some seats in the places of worship were raised, so that even the footstool would be elevated above a lower seat. The meaning is, that he would be treated as if he were not worth the least attention.

**LAN: 2-4** Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. 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. Sometimes we do this because (1) poverty makes us

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<sup>12</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

uncomfortable; we don't want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do; (2) we want to be wealthy too, and we hope to use the rich person as a means to that end; (3) we want the rich person to join our church 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.

## **James 2:4**

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

Lev 19:15 - "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: *but* in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour."

We live in a society where even the decisions of our courts and governmental bodies are meted out with more regard to social pressures—and power—rather than real justice.

Questions 1-4 in the Book of James, the next questions are in James 2:14. These questions confirm the facts that:

1. The judge was partial (James 2:4)
2. The judge had evil thoughts (James 2:4)
3. God hath chosen the poor who are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom in preference to the rich of this world who do not have faith (James 2:5)
4. The judge despised the poor (James 2:6)
5. Wicked rich men oppress the poor (James 2:6)
6. They force the poor to trials before judges that are partial to themselves
7. They blaspheme God's name (James 2:7)<sup>13</sup>

**Clarke: Are ye not then partial** Do ye not make a distinction, though the case has not been heard, and the law has not decided?

**Clarke: Judges of evil thoughts?** Judges of evil reasonings; that is, judges who reason wickedly; who, in effect, say in your hearts, we will espouse the cause of the rich, because they can befriend us; we will neglect that of the poor, because they cannot help us, nor have they power to hurt us.

**LAN: 2-4** We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly assume that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval. 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 (Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 19:28-30; Luke 12:14-34; Romans 8:15-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life (Luke 6:35; John 12:23-25; Galatians 6:7-10; Titus 3:4-8).

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<sup>13</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

The illustration is followed by a penetrating inquiry: **Have you not discriminated among yourselves?** The question in Greek assumes an affirmative answer. James' brethren must plead guilty not only to discriminatory divisions but also to assuming the role of **judges with evil thoughts** of partiality.<sup>14</sup>

One example of the expression of such prejudice takes place within the church assembly. This world, and each of its cultures, is made up of all sorts of people. Communities are becoming multi-cultural, multilingual, as they are already multi-ethnic, embracing the lives of a wide variety of people from the rich to the poor.

Under Jewish law, those who would enter the assembly would stand alike. This was not difficult for the Jew since those who were not like them were not allowed in the assembly. Much of this prejudice is replicated today in mono-ethnic congregations. Members will argue, "they will not be happy here ... let them worship with others like them." The key here is this "we - them" mentality. This is an indication of the sin of disrespect that so diminishes the practice of love. Christians who demonstrate such prejudice are revealed to be just as ungodly as those who James described in previous verses who are defiled by sin. Prejudice is a defiling sin, one which must be repented of by any true believer.

We separate ourselves from one another by setting up our own set of standards. God has no standards that separate people from Himself except the Standard of the Cross. God sees the potential of all people to have faith in Him, and does not base their value on their worldly state as contrasted with others.

It might be interesting to note the relativity of this argument. James is writing to believers who are persecuted by their culture. Among their assembly are the poorest of the land. Still, they have their definition of "goodly apparel" as a gold ring, and recognize the "vile raiment" of the poor. They feel victimized by the prejudice and unfair treatment of the rich and famous, but still exercise that same victimization of the strata in their own body. Prejudice knows no boundaries. Such prejudice has no place in the heart of a faithful believer. This respect of persons is caused by the basic nature of man - to seek outward show rather than inward grace.<sup>15</sup>

## **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?**

The Lord is on the side of the poor. He was born in a borrowed stable. He had to borrow loaves and fishes from a little boy to feed the crowd. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." (Mt 8:20) He had to borrow a coin to illustrate the truth. He borrowed a donkey to present Himself to

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<sup>14</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

Jerusalem. He borrowed a room to celebrate Passover. He died on a borrowed cross: it belonged to Barabbas, not to Him. They put Him in a borrowed tomb—it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea. Isa 53:1-3.

Job 5:15; 36:15; Psalm 9:18; 68:10; 69:33; 72:12-13; 102:17; Isaiah 11:4.

(James is also a bit hard on the rich in Chapter 5.)

**Clarke: Hath not God chosen the poor of this world**—This seems to refer to Matthew 11:5: And the poor have the Gospel preached to them. These believed on the Lord Jesus, and found his salvation; while the rich despised, neglected, and persecuted him. These had that faith in Christ which put them in possession of the choicest spiritual blessings, and gave them a right to the kingdom of heaven. While, therefore, they were despised of men, they were highly prized of God.

**LAN:** When James speaks about the poor, he is talking about those who have no money and also about those whose simple values are despised by much of our affluent society. Perhaps the “poor” people prefer serving to managing, human relationships to financial security, peace to power. This does not mean that the poor will automatically go to heaven and the rich to hell. Poor people, however, are usually more aware of their powerlessness. Thus it is often easier for them to acknowledge their need for salvation. One of the greatest barriers to salvation for the rich is pride. For the poor, bitterness can often bar the way to acceptance of salvation.

5-7. With the plea, Listen, my dear brothers, James went on to explain why their preferential judgment was wrong. He made his point through four questions, each of which anticipated an affirmative answer. First, Has not God chosen those who appear poor materially, but are rich spiritually, to inherit His promised kingdom? (cf. 1:9) Second, Are not the rich the ones who are consistently guilty of oppression, extortion, and slander (*blasphēmousin*, 2:7, lit., “blasphemy”). Third, Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Fourth, Are they not the ones who slander Jesus’ noble name? Believers belong to Him, not to the rich exploiters. James’ readers would have to agree with these contentions, and to recognize that insulting the poor and favoring the rich was wrong and totally unreasonable.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:5–7). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

## **James 2:6**

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

Isaiah 5: 23 - “Woe unto them... ..Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!”

We pluck our candidates from the flies of the political marketplace. We allow a corrupt press to manufacture political correctness to replace truth; fabricating views of convenience to match their hidden agendas.

Our politicians review the polls each day to determine what they now believe.

Anger replaces patriotism. Frustration is tearing at every fabric of our divisive society. Thus, we have now become a nation without shared values. A growing mass of parasites without leadership.

We have lawyers without justice;  
stewards without accountability;  
elected representatives who ignore their commitment to our Constitution.  
We have legislators who vote without even *reading* the proposals before them.<sup>2</sup>

Our security forces have become the mercenaries of the globalists and prostituted to the egos of our politicians.

Our media presents a perspective that masks the deterioration of our national security and the inevitable financial upheaval on our horizon.

### **Larry Abraham’s Letter: One Who Voted with his Feet (Chuck Missler)**

Larry Abraham, writer of the famed *Insider Report* and a number of highly respected books, and an old friend, was asked by some students, “What is the biggest problem in the United States?”

After serious consideration, Larry concluded that it was “the Lack of Justice.” He left the United States a few years ago. He was the 9<sup>th</sup> newsletter writer to leave for a foreign domicile. (*Money* magazine has indicated that 250,000 Americans expatriated that year.)

Larry’s reasons are provocative:

“My people came to America to live as free men, and I had to leave it for the same reason... The greatest single U.S. problem is the increasing loss of the concept of *justice* within the hearts of minds of the American people... Once lost, that concept is hardly ever recovered... Justice is no longer the base on which America conducts its affairs. Clinton and Rodham didn’t cause this condition; they are the sad consequences of it, as are the legions of bureaucrats at the FTC, IRS, SEC, HHS, the jurors at the

Rodney King, Reginald Denny and Menendez trials. As are the killing of Mrs. Weaver and baby by the FBI, the torching at Waco by BATF, the drive-by shootings, the intellectual insanity of political correctness, the institutionalizing of perverts as a core constituency of the Democratic Party. The politics of envy sponsors an entire body of law that amounts to what the French philosopher Frederic Bastiat called 'legal plunder.' The maze of law that guards this plunder has grown so vast it's now impossible even to know what is legal and what is not...

"My commitment has always been, as yours should be, not to a plot of ground but to a moral philosophy. As long as the USA was the finest example of that philosophy, as long as it struggled justly to live by its high ideals, I would fight to preserve and protect it. And I did so. But when my country becomes as it has the primary purveyor and financier for all I abhor, and without any reasonable sign of reversing itself, then I must choose a different venue from which to carry on the war begun by Burke and Madison, Jefferson, John Adams, Hamilton and Jay."<sup>17</sup>

This was written before we had the benefit of the O.J. Simpson verdict Or the Oklahoma City bombing. Or the murder of Vince Foster. The Nazis in Germany always operated under the color of law.<sup>18</sup>

**McGee:** Whether it is at the hands of a rich corporation or of a rich labor union, the powerful are not giving the poor an honest deal. Every year the politicians come out to us when they are running for office and say that they are going to work for and help all of us poor people. It does not make any difference what political party is in power, they wind up exploiting us. If I sound rather cynical, my friend, it is because I was born a poor boy and I have not gotten very far from that even to this day. From that viewpoint I am cynical because I have seen the way the poor are treated on this earth. Their only hope is in Jesus Christ. They have been despised by the world. The rich and powerful want their vote, but that ends their interest in them.<sup>19</sup>

## **James 2:7**

**Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?**

If you are mistreating the poor, you are blaspheming the name of Christ.

Far more effective than apologetics: our lives and ministries are the best defense of the inspiration and authority of the Word of God.

We are becoming increasingly "politically incorrect." There may well be some among us who will have the unspeakable privilege to give our very lives in testimony to that "worthy name by which we are called."

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted from his October *Insider Report*. P.O. Box 84903, Phoenix AZ 85071.

<sup>18</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on James, khouse.org

<sup>19</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:6). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**Clarke: Blaspheme that worthy name**—They took every occasion to asperse the Christian name and the Christian faith, and have been, from the beginning to the present day, famous for their blasphemies against Christ and his religion. It is evident that these were Jews of whom St. James speaks; no Christians in these early times could have acted the part here mentioned.

In Palestine, as in most of the empire, the rich were oppressing the poor (2:6–7). But the temptation to make rich converts or inquirers feel welcome at the expense of the poor was immoral (2:4). The language of impartiality was normally applied especially to legal settings, but because synagogues served both as houses of prayer and as community courts, this predominantly legal image naturally applies to any gatherings there.<sup>20</sup>

James points out the paradox that is demonstrated by the venerating of the rich against the plight of the poor. In reality, those who are venerated deserve no such attention, as these are the ones who despise and oppress the poor. It is these people who use their power to drag the poor into the courts, taking their land and possessions. They blaspheme God by using His name but have not appropriated for themselves any of His power. Their lives are not characterized by agape love, and therefore, should be afforded no special place in the assembly. Where the natural bent is to respect the "rich and famous," those worthy and in need of our respect are the poor.<sup>21</sup>

## **James 2:8**

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

James drew on Lev 19:18 in the OT and designated the “Golden Rule” as the *royal law*. Who is our “neighbor?” Luke 10:25-37.

Why “royal”?

It was given by our King;

It rules all other laws. (Rom 13:10)

Obeying it makes you a king. (Hatred makes you a slave.)

Love is an act of will, not emotion. Christian love means treating others as God has treated me.

**[the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself]**

**(Dake)** The law of both the old and new covenants demanded that men love their neighbors as themselves (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39; Romans 13:8-9; Galatians 5:14; Ephes. 5:2). The new covenant—the perfect law of liberty—is referred to here, for James is writing to Christians (James 1:25). It was customary among Greek writers to

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synagogues \***Synagogues**. Assembly places used by Jewish people for public prayer, Scripture readings and community meetings.

<sup>20</sup>Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (Jas 2:1). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

use the word royal of anything that was of general concern, noble, grand, or useful. James uses it of the law of love, which came from God and was emphasized by Christ as being suitable and necessary to all men (John 13:34; John 15:12).

**Clarke: The royal law** This epithet, of all the New Testament writers, is peculiar to James; but it is frequent among the Greek writers in the sense in which it appears St. James uses it. Royal, is used to signify anything that is of general concern, is suitable to all, and necessary for all, as brotherly love is. This commandment; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, is a royal law, not only because it is ordained of God, and proceeds from his kingly authority over men, but because it is so useful, suitable, and necessary to the present state of man; and as it was given us particularly by Christ himself, John 13:34; 15:12, who is our King, as well as Prophet and Priest, it should ever put us in mind of his authority over us, and our subjection to him. As the regal state is the most excellent for secular dignity and civil utility that exists among men, hence we give the epithet royal to whatever is excellent, noble, grand, or useful.

**LAN:** The *royal law* is the law of our great King Jesus Christ, who said, “Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). This law, originally summarized in Leviticus 19:18, is the basis for all the laws of how people should relate to one another. Christ reinforced this truth in Matthew 22:37-40, and Paul taught it in Romans 13:8 and Galatians 5:14.

**JNTC: Kingdom Torah**, usually rendered “the royal law” (but “law of the Kingdom” in Today’s English Version), since Greek *basilikos*, like English “royal,” means “of or pertaining to the king.” The *Torah* of and pertaining to King Yeshua is precisely that which holds in the “Kingdom” of God mentioned in v. 5.

**Kingdom Torah** is not a new *Torah* given by the Messiah (see 1:25 and references there). It does not make the Mosaic Law obsolete, even though, as Ga 5:14&N puts it (compare Ro 13:8–10), “the whole of the *Torah* is summed up in this one sentence: **Love your neighbor as yourself.**” Rather, Ya’akov means that *Kingdom Torah* is in essence nothing other than the *Torah* of Moses carried out, by the power of the Holy Spirit, **in conformity with its own passage that says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”** Yeshua was pointing in this direction when he said that this is one of the two *mitzvot* (“principles,” Mt 22:36&N) on which all of the *Torah* and the Prophets depend (Mt 22:40). Here the principle says that the poor, including the “widows and orphans” of 1:26, as well as the rich are counted as “neighbors” to be loved as oneself; Yeshua meant the same at Lk 10:25–37 in the parable of the man from Shomron.

**If you ... attain the goal of Kingdom Torah.** This is usually understood to mean, “If you fulfill it, if you observe it and obey it.” But Greek *teleite* also allows the translation, “If you complete *Kingdom Torah*,” if you bring it to its goal (see Ro 10:4N, MJ 7:11N). That would mean that the believers would accomplish the purpose of *Kingdom Torah* by obeying the *Torah* of Moses, interpreted **in conformity with the passage that says, “Love your neighbor as yourself,”** that is, in such a way as to take into account the coming of Yeshua the Messiah and the New Covenant. If, as many think, Ya’akov’s letter was the first book of the New Testament to be written, then one could say that the other New Testament characters and writers in effect followed his recommendation and completed *Kingdom Torah* (or reported its completion) in such passages as Ac 10:28,

34–35; 15:19–29; Ro 3:19–31; 11:16–22; Ga 2:11–16; 3:28; MJ 7:12–15; 8:6; 10:14–18 (see notes there and at Ac 21:21). And this would be in keeping with Yeshua’s commission to his *talmidim* at Mt 18:18, “Whatever you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven,” a commission first given to Kefa along with “the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven,” which is the same **Kingdom** as mentioned here and in v. 5 (Mt 16:19&N).

Although obeying and interpreting *Torah* are thought of in Judaism as quite distinct, since the rabbinical authorities are the only authorized interpreters who may establish *halakhah*, it is nevertheless clear that there is a sense in which any obedience at all requires a measure of interpretation, at least the measure necessary to understand what it is that must be obeyed. Moreover, a Messianic believer attempting to “attain the goal of Kingdom *Torah*” is not given free rein to do what is right in his own eyes; the proviso that the *Torah* is to be accomplished according to the principle of neighborly love sets boundaries. But this canon of interpretation might lead to a different *halakhah* from that of non-Messianic Judaism. The issues that might be raised in the resulting *machloket* (“dispute”) are beyond the scope of this commentary.<sup>22</sup>

### **James 2:9**

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

If you show any degree of partiality and injustice you break God's law. You are a transgressor (1 John 3:4).

**Clarke: But if ye have respect to persons**—In judgment, or in any other way; ye commit sin against God, and against your brethren, and are convinced, and are convicted, by the law; by this royal law, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself; as transgressors, having shown this sinful acceptance of persons, which has led you to refuse justice to the poor man, and uphold the rich in his oppressive conduct.

**JNTC: Your actions constitute.** Greek *ergazesthe*, related to “*erga*” (“actions”), which appears twelve times in vv. 14–26. Thus **if you show favoritism**, then, no matter how much faith you claim to have, **your actions constitute sin**. It is this theme, what sort of actions must accompany genuine faith, which is picked up and given detailed treatment in vv. 14–26.

**Your actions constitute sin, since you are convicted under the *Torah* as transgressors.** The *Torah* condemns favoritism in another context with these words: “Do not respect persons in judgment, but hear the small as well as the great; do not be afraid of the face of any man, for the judgment is God’s” (Deuteronomy 1:17). Sha’ul too relates sin to transgression of the *Torah* (see Ro 4:15, 7:7–12), as does Yochanan (“sin is violation of *Torah*,” 1 Yn 3:4; or, in KJV, “sin is the transgression of the law”).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:8). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>23</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:9). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Who is my neighbor? It is easy to love my neighbor when he looks, walks, talks, and smells like me. However, we pick our neighbors, befriending those of our own choosing. It is here that prejudice enters our lives. If there is any doubt as to the sinfulness of prejudice, James removes it here. If one demonstrates prejudice, or disrespect of other persons, they have committed a sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. If God put his law within us then His Spirit convinces us of our wrongdoing. We do not need a written law to tell us we have transgressed. Listening to the Word of God in our hearts far supersedes the searching of Bible text to defend or attack the righteousness of a given action. We can look into our own hearts, as we were to gaze in a mirror, and determine whether we are in need of repentance.<sup>24</sup>

### **James 2:10**

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

Suspend a man over a precipice by a chain of ten links; how many of these need to snap to plunge him into the abyss below? The breaking of the weakest link shatters the chain and the man falls to his doom.

We all stand before God as lawbreakers.

**[guilty of all]** The reason for this is that one sin is enough to damn the soul (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12-21). The obligation to law is total (Deut. 27:26; Galatians 3:10). This applies to all laws that have the death penalty (James 2:11; Romans 1:32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Galatians 5:19-21). One is guilty of law breaking whether he breaks one or many laws (James 2:11). The authority which gave one commandment gave all of them and the one who resists Him by breaking one law is guilty of the whole.<sup>25</sup>

**Clarke: For whosoever shall keep the whole law, etc.**—This is a rabbinical form of speech. In the tract Shabbath, fol. 70, where they dispute concerning the thirty-nine works commanded by Moses, Rabbi Yochanan says: But if a man do the whole, with the omission of one, he is guilty of the whole, and of every one. In Bammidar rabba, sec. 9, fol. 200, and in Tanchum, fol. 60, there is a copious example given, how an adulteress, by that one crime, breaks all the ten commandments, and by the same mode of proof any one sin may be shown to be a breach of the whole decalogue. The truth is, any sin is against the Divine authority; and he who has committed one transgression is guilty of death; and by his one deliberate act dissolves, as far as he can, the sacred connection that subsists between all the Divine precepts and the obligation which he is under to obey, and thus casts off in effect his allegiance to God. For, if God should be obeyed in any one instance, he should be obeyed in all, as the authority and reason of obedience are the same in every case; he therefore who breaks one of these laws is, in effect, if not in fact, guilty of the whole. But there is scarcely a more common form of speech among the

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

<sup>25</sup> Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

rabbins than this, for they consider that any one sin has the seeds of all others in it. See a multitude of examples in Schoettgen.

**LAN:** Christians must not use this verse to justify sinning. We dare not say: “Because I can’t keep every demand of God, why even try?” James reminds us that 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. You can’t break the law a little bit; if you have broken it at all, you need Christ to pay for your sin. Measure yourself, not someone else, against God’s standards. Ask for forgiveness where you need it, and then renew your effort to put your faith into practice.

**he is guilty of all:** God does not allow selective obedience. We cannot choose to obey the parts of the Law that are to our own liking and disregard the rest. Some of the Pharisees were guilty of this. They carefully observed some of the requirements of the Law, such as keeping the Sabbath, and ignored others, such as honoring their parents (see Jesus’ comments in Matt. 15:1–7). Sin is violation of the perfect righteousness of God, who is the Lawgiver. James is saying that the whole divine law has to be accepted as an expression of God’s will for His people. The violation of even one commandment separates an individual from God and His purposes.<sup>26</sup>

**ESV: 10–11 accountable for all of it.** The law was considered an interdependent whole, and any infraction constituted a breaking of the law as a whole. Jesus said, “not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18). Thus favoritism (James 2:9) makes one “accountable” (Gk. *enochos*, a legal term for “liable” or “guilty” before God’s court) for the **whole law**.

### **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.**

And vice versa. How hopeless are the efforts of anyone to be justified on the ground of his own obedience.

**(Dake) [Do not commit adultery ... Do not kill]** These commandments are in both covenants, the old and the new (Exodus 20:13-14; Matthew 5:21-32; Romans 13:9). We are not now under obligation to obey them because they are part of the old covenant which is abolished, but because they are part of the new (Acts 15:24).

**Clarke: For he that said**—That is, the authority that gave one commandment gave also the rest; and he who breaks one resists this authority; so that the breach of any one commandment may be justly considered a breach of the whole law. It was a maxim also among the Jewish doctors that, if a man kept any one commandment carefully, though he broke all the rest, he might assure himself of the favor of God; for while they taught that “He who transgresses all the precepts of the law has broken the yoke, dissolved the

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<sup>26</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

covenant, and exposed the law to contempt, and so has he done who has broken even one precept,” (Mechilta, fol. 5, Yalcut Simeoni, part 1, fol. 59), they also taught, “that he who observed any principal command was equal to him who kept the whole law;” (Kiddushin, fol. 39); and they give for example, “If a man abandon idolatry, it is the same as if he had fulfilled the whole law,” (Ibid., fol. 40.) To correct this false doctrine James lays down that in the 11th verse. Thus they did and undid.

With liberty comes responsibility to remain sensitive to what constitutes righteous living. Any unrighteousness is sin. Not all sins are equal, but they all carry the same contempt of the authority of the Lawgiver. Consequently, it is ridiculous to think our good deeds may outweigh our bad. It is our bad deeds which condemn us, and a single bad deed is such an offense. If we were without the forgiveness of sin that Christ affords, we would be the most miserable of creatures. But God has demonstrated that He is faithful to forgive sins when we confess them and repent (turn from those sins.) We are all guilty and in need of repentance and forgiveness. Consequently, as stated earlier in this chapter, we must listen to the Word and respond in a Godly manner.

Obedience is acceptable when the focus is on the will of God. Any disobedience is to be condemned. When we disobey we show contempt for the authority of God. If we look to the old law we stand condemned because we cannot keep it. When we look to the Perfect Law of Liberty we see an opportunity for forgiveness and restoration.<sup>27</sup>

## **James 2:12**

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

John 14:15 “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Every orthodox statement of faith ends with a statement about the return of Jesus Christ and the final judgment. (Not all Christians agree as to the details, but none deny the certainty of them.)

Both Jesus (John 5:24) and Paul (Rom 8:1) assured us that Christian believers will never be judged for their sins; *but* our works *will* be judged and rewarded. (Rom 14:10-13; 2 Cor 5:9-10).

Our words will be judged: (James 2:3) Mt 12:36. “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Our deeds will be judged. Col 3:22-25.

While God remembers our sins no more (Jer 31:24; Heb 10:17), they affect our character and works.

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<sup>27</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

**Clarke: So speak ye, and so do**—Have respect to every commandment of God, for this the law of liberty—the Gospel of Jesus Christ, particularly requires; and this is the law by which all mankind, who have had the opportunity of knowing it, shall be judged. But all along St. James particularly refers to the precept, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

**LAN:** As Christians we are saved by God’s free gift (grace) through faith, not by keeping the law. But as Christians, we are also required to obey Christ. The apostle Paul taught “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Cor. 5:10) to be judged for our conduct. God’s grace does not cancel our duty to obey him; it gives our obedience a new basis. The law is no longer an external set of rules, but it is a “law that gives freedom”—one we joyfully and willingly carry out, because we love God and because we have the power of his Holy Spirit to carry it out (see James 1:25).

12-13. Total obedience is the key. One must both habitually speak and act (Gr. pres. tense imper.) as those to be judged by the Law. God’s Law, because of its wise constraints, brings true freedom (cf. 1:25). Disobedience to God’s Law brings bondage; and to those who have not been merciful, God’s judgment is without mercy. Just as love triumphs over prejudice, mercy triumphs over judgment. The verb “triumphs” or “exults over” (*katakauchatai*) appears only here, in 3:14, and in Romans 11:18.

God has ordained unalterable laws. Complete and consistent obedience is required if spiritual maturity is to be attained. The believer is commanded to accept his brother with courtesy, compassion, and consistency.<sup>28</sup>

**ESV: the law of liberty.** True freedom is freedom to obey God and do what pleases him. The law of Christ provides freedom from sin through the gospel. In the context of James’s discussion of rich and poor (vv. 1–7), he may also be suggesting that God’s law will set the poor free from prejudice, oppression, and exploitation. Every Christian will be **judged** by God (1 Cor. 3:12–15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17).

### **James 2:13**

**For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.**

Our attitudes will also be judged.

Mercy and compassion are not competitors; they both come from God. Mt 18:21-35.

Is our *walk consistent* with our profession of faith? This is James’ key point.

It is not the desire of God to deal harshly with anyone. He is ever ready to forgive and bless where sin is recognized and confessed. 1 John 1:9. As objects of mercy ourselves,

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<sup>28</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:12–13). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

we are called upon to show mercy and compassion on others, no matter how lowly their condition may be.

A story is told that took place in London when a great preacher, very fine young man, by the name of Caesar Milan was invited one evening to a very large and prominent home where a choice musical was to be presented. On the program was a young lady who thrilled the audience with her singing and playing.

When she finished, this young preacher threaded his way through the crowd which was gathered around her. When he finally came to her and had her attention, he said, "Young lady, when you were singing, I sat there and thought how tremendously the cause of Christ would be benefited if you would dedicate yourself and your talents to the Lord. But," he added, "you are just as much a sinner as the worst drunkard in the street, or any harlot on Scarlet Street. But I am glad to tell you that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, will cleanse you from all sin if you will come to Him."

In a very haughty manner, she turned her head aside and said to him, "You are very insulting, sir." And she started to walk away. He said, "Lady, I did not mean any offense, but I pray that the Spirit of God will convict you."

Well, they all went home, and that night this young woman could not sleep. At two o'clock in the morning she knelt at the side of her bed and took Christ as her Savior. And then she, Charlotte Elliott, sat down and wrote the words of a hymn, *Just as I Am*.<sup>29</sup>

*Just as I am, without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come!  
Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come!  
[and then the final stanza:]  
Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,  
Because Thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come.*

This is the basis on which all of us must come to Christ.

Summary: Our behavior reflects what we really believe.

Is God really gracious?

Is He really true?

Is He really going to judge us?

Our conduct reveals our real convictions.

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<sup>29</sup> J. Vernon McGee, *James*, p.62.

**[For he shall have judgment without mercy ...]** Three laws:

1. The law of mercy (Matthew 5:7)
2. Law of forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15)
3. Law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7-8)

**[mercy]** The ones who receive mercy and show mercy rejoice in the fact that they will not face judgment because of obeying the law. They will be exalted by mercy above judgment. There is no mercy in law. The meaning is that mercy through grace will triumph over law because the demands of the law have been met by grace and the lawbreakers are justified by it through faith to escape the judgment of the law (John 3:36; John 5:24).

**Clarke: For he shall have judgment**—He who shows no mercy to man, or, in other words, he who does not exercise himself in works of charity and mercy to his needy fellow creatures, shall receive no mercy at the hand of God; for he hath said, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. The unmerciful therefore are cursed, and they shall obtain no mercy.

**Mercy rejoiceth against judgment**—These words are variously understood.

1. Mercy, the merciful man, the abstract for the concrete, exults over judgment, that is, he is not afraid of it, having acted according to the law of liberty, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
2. Ye shall be exalted by mercy above judgment.
3. For he (God) exalts mercy above judgment.
4. A merciful man rejoices rather in opportunities of showing mercy, than in acting according to strict justice.
5. In the great day, though justice might condemn every man according to the rigour of the law, yet God will cause mercy to triumph over justice in bringing those into his glory who, for his sake, had fed the hungry, clothed the naked, ministered to the sick, and visited the prisoners. See what our Lord says, Matthew 25:31-46.

In the MSS. and versions there is a considerable variety of readings on this verse, and some of the senses given above are derived from those readings. The spirit of the saying may be found in another scripture, I will have mercy and not sacrifice—I prefer works of charity and mercy to every thing else, and especially to all acts of worship. The ROYAL LAW, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, should particularly prevail among men, because of the miserable state to which all are reduced by sin, so that each particularly needs the help of his brother.

**McGee:** In verses 14–26 James shows that God tests faith by good works. There are those who say that we have in this section a contradiction to the writings of Paul, because Paul made it abundantly clear that faith *alone* could save you. We have his clear statement in Galatians 2:16—“Knowing that a man is *not* justified by the works of the law, but by the *faith* of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified”(italics mine).

I have divided this section up as follows: (1) The interpretation of faith (v. 14); (2) the identification of faith (vv. 15–20); and (3) the illustration of faith (vv. 21–26).

First we have *the interpretation of faith*. When we understand the definition of faith as it is used by Paul and James in the context of their writings, we can see that Paul and James are in perfect agreement, that they are discussing the same subject from different viewpoints.

Paul says that a man is not saved by the works or the deeds of the Law. In Romans 3:28 he writes, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” In Galatians, as we have noted, Paul says that a man is justified not by works but by faith in Christ Jesus. How then are we going to reconcile Paul and James? As someone has said, “Paul and James do not stand face to face, fighting against each other, but they stand back to back, fighting opposite foes.” In that day there were those who were saying that you had to perform the works of the Law (the Mosaic Law), that you had to come by the Law, in order to be saved. Paul answered that by saying that the works of the Law will not save you and that only faith in Christ can save you. Both Paul and James, therefore, are defending the citadel of *faith*. To see that, we need to understand the use of their terminology. Paul says that *saving faith*—a faith which is genuine and real—will transform a person’s life. Paul said of himself, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Phil. 3:7). A real revolution took place in his life when he came to Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:1–2 Paul wrote, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are *saved*, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain;” that is, unless it was just an empty faith (italics mine).<sup>30</sup>

James concludes his discussion with an exhortation and a warning. The repetition of “so” places a very strong emphasis in the Greek form of the statement. James exhorts Christians to speak and act as those who are living by the Perfect Law of Liberty. That is, Christians are to listen to God’s will in their lives and respond to Him in obedience. All Christians are subject to the sins of this world, and must be continually listening to the Holy Spirit for guidance on how to keep their lives undefiled. For most, there is much defilement in their lives already that must be cleansed in order to appropriate for themselves the full measure of blessing that God affords. James has described offenses of filthy morality, self-will, and prejudice. These and other sins vex the lives of Christians, and will continue to vex those who refuse to listen to God’s Word and refuse to repent.

God has little mercy for those who show little mercy to others. This statement should be of concern to all Christians. Christians who truly love others will have a heart of compassion and mercy for all people. This compassion and mercy cannot be contained, and will be evident in their lives. This is a first step to fulfilling the Law of Liberty. Let us all be sensitive to the Holy Spirit at all times, observant of His Word, intently listening to biblical teaching, and as clay in the potters hands, teachable and flexible so that we can mature in the faith, come closer to God, and experience more of the blessings of the faith.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>31</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

**Spurgeon:** Mercy reigns in our salvation, let it reign in our conduct to others. To us it is not sweet to take vengeance, but to grant forgiveness.

**ESV: For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.** This proverbial saying sums up the implications of vv. 1–12 and leads into the “faith without works” discussion in vv. 14–26. It was the core of Roman law (*lex talionis*, “the law of retribution”), but more importantly it is central to God's law: what you do to others will be done to you in the judgment (i.e., rewarded for good and punished for evil). **Mercy triumphs over judgment** does not, in this context, mean that God's mercy is extended to believers at the judgment. Rather, believers' acts of mercy (e.g., caring for the poor and hurting) will mean that they are vindicated at the judgment (cf. Matt. 25:34–40). Mercy was an essential OT requirement for dealing with the poor (Mic. 6:8; Zech. 7:9–10). Mercy is likewise a requirement of believers in the NT (e.g., Matt. 5:7; 6:15; 18:32–35), or they will experience God's judgment rather than his mercy.

By the time we arrive at this point in James' letter to the church, he has been making it very clear that there is evidence of true faith in the life of every believer. Jesus said in the "Sermon on the Mount", that "A City on a hill cannot be hidden." As the "light of the world," Christians are characterized by their love for one another and for the lost. Such love expresses itself as a natural fruit of the Spirit. When there is no such fruit in the life of one who claims to be a Christian, the integrity of that testimony comes into question. It is this same argument that James is making as he describes the relationship between faith and works.

Some theologians over the years, as great as Martin Luther, misunderstood the context of James' use of "works," arguing that James emphasis on works is contradictory to Paul's assertion of salvation by faith alone. However, one must understand that when applied to this argument, each author is referring to a different kind of work. Paul, when he writes about works, is referring to works of the flesh ... tasks that people accomplish in their own strength and purpose in order to attain a goal. Works cannot serve to bring one salvation. James fully agrees with this. When James is referring to works, he is writing of works of the Spirit, the natural fruit of the Spirit that are borne by a Christian without thought of self-interest, but rather inspired by a love for others. Again, when such fruit is absent, the validity of an individual's faith is called to question.<sup>32</sup>

## **James 2:14**

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

### **Faith**

**Faith is key doctrine in the Christian Life:**

The sinner is saved by faith (Eph 2:8-9).

The believer must walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7).

Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6).

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<sup>32</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

Whatever we do apart from faith is sin (Rom 14:23).

Faith is not believing in spite of evidence;

Faith is *obeying* in spite of consequence.

Faith is not a feeling we work up; it is *confidence* that God's Word is true; and that acting upon that Word will bring His blessing.

What kind of faith saves a person?

Is it necessary to perform good works in order to be saved?

How can a person tell whether or not he is exercising true saving faith?<sup>33</sup>

### **Three Kinds of Faith:**

James explains that there are three kinds of faith.

There are those who claimed they had saving faith, yet did *not* possess salvation! Mt 7:16-21.

These are Questions 5-7 in the Book of James, the next questions are in James 2:20.

**[say he hath faith, and have not works]** This refers to those who say that they have faith and the works are not necessary in Christian living. It does not say they have real and active faith, but they say they have. Can faith alone save (James 2:17-18,20-26)? James is not referring to initial justifying faith but to the demonstration of Christian faith before men. Christianity demands of its followers good works to all men (Matthew 5:16; Matthew 16:27; Ephes. 2:10; 1 Tim. 6:18; 2 Tim. 3:17; Titus 1:16; Titus 2:7,14; Titus 3:8). One is not justified by works (Romans 3:25-31; Romans 4:1-6; Romans 9:11; Romans 11:6; Galatians 2:16; Ephes. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5), but justified ones must do them to prove their Christian consecration (James 2:14-18,20-26).

When someone claims to have faith, what he or she may have is intellectual assent—agreement with a set of Christian teachings—and as such it would be incomplete faith. True faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts. If our lives remain unchanged, we don't truly believe the truths we claim to believe.

Just as the law of love gives no excuse for respect of persons, so the possession of faith gives no license to dispense with good works. A believer must not only demonstrate his love by ready acceptance of others, but he must also demonstrate his faith by responsible aid to others. James went on in his letter to emphasize the expression of true faith, to outline the evidence of true faith, and finally to cite examples of true faith.<sup>34</sup>

Another shift in the argument of the epistle can be seen by James' use of **my brothers**. He introduced this paragraph with a rhetorical question, **What good is it ... if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?** The emphasis is not on the true nature of faith but on the false claim of faith. It is the spurious boast of faith that James condemned. Such "faith" does no "good"; there is no "profit" (*ophelos*, used in the NT only here and

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<sup>33</sup> Chuck Missler, Book of James notes, khouse.org

<sup>34</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:12–13). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

in v. 16; 1 Cor. 15:32). It is worthless because it is all talk with no walk. It is only a habitual empty boast (“claims” is in the pres. tense). **Can such faith save him?** A negative answer is anticipated in the Greek. Merely claiming to have faith is not enough. Genuine faith is evidenced by works.<sup>35</sup>

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

James is not talking about the works of the Law. He simply says that the faith which saves you *will* produce works, works of faith. The faith that James is talking about here is *professing faith*, that which is phony and counterfeit. Paul refers to the same idea when he says in 1 Corinthians 15:2, “... unless ye have believed in vain.” Paul also wrote, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ...” (2 Cor. 13:5).

One of the greatest dangers for us preachers of the gospel is that we like to see people converted, and we are willing to accept a brazen and flippant yes from some individual who says, “Yes, I’ll trust Jesus.” However, it might be just an impertinent, impudent, and insolent nod of the head; it is so easy today to be as phony as a three-dollar bill.

The story is told that the Devil had a meeting with his demons to decide how to persuade men that God was nonexistent. Since they themselves believed in His existence, they wondered just how to do it. One demon suggested that they tell people Jesus Christ never really existed and that men should not believe such fiction. Another demon suggested that they persuade men that death ends all and there is no need to worry about life after death. Finally, the most intelligent demon suggested that they tell everyone that there is a God, that there is Jesus Christ, and that believing in Him saves, but all you have to do is profess faith in Christ and then go on living in sin as you used to. They decided to use this tactic, and it is the tactic the Devil uses even today.

Paul and James are in perfect harmony in their teaching. When Paul speaks of works, it is *works of the Law*. He says in Romans 3:20, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” He is saying in effect, “Yes, the Law is a mirror—it reveals you are a sinner—but it cannot save you; the works of the Law cannot save you at all.” James also says that you have to have something more than just the works of the Law. He wrote, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (v. 10). As someone has put it, “Man cannot be saved by perfect obedience, for he cannot render it. He cannot be saved by imperfect obedience because God will not accept it.” The only solution to this dilemma is the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and both James and Paul emphasize that.

In Galatians 2:16 Paul made it clear that men are not saved by the Law, but later in that epistle he wrote, “And let us not be weary in well-doing ...” (Gal. 6:9). There is a lot of *doing* that goes with *believing*. “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:6–7). In this section of his epistle when James speaks of works, he is speaking of the *works of faith*. Paul also wrote about works of faith: “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision;

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<sup>35</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:14). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

but faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). Both of these men taught that faith must be a working faith. As John Calvin put it, “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.”

Saving faith, therefore, is alive; professing faith is dead. We have a lot of so-called professing Christians today who are members of churches. They are nothing in the world but zombies. They are walking around as if they are alive, but they are dead.

A girl once asked her Sunday school teacher, “How can I be a Christian and still have my own way?” The teacher gave to her Romans 8:5 which says, “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.” If you are a child of God, you cannot have your own way. You are going to do His way. “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be . . . . But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you . . .” (Romans 8:7, 9). Paul says that now that you are indwelt by the Spirit of God, you can produce the fruit of the Spirit in your life; if you don’t, there is something radically wrong. A Christian doesn’t do as he pleases. he does as Christ pleases.

During the depression there lived in Pittsburgh a tycoon who was having all kinds of problems in his life. He went to his pastor and, after talking over his problems, he said, “I love my Savior. I love my family. I love my church. I love my business. But there are times I feel like walking out on all four of them.” The pastor looked him straight in the eye and said, “Well, why don’t you?” The man replied, “The reason I don’t is that I am a Christian.” May I say to you, saving faith which makes one a Christian will lead to good works. However, we are so anxious to get church members that we accept them on the slightest profession. As a result, many churches are filled with professing Christians who are really unbelievers.

When we understand how Paul and James use the words *faith* and *works*, we can see that they are in total agreement in their teaching.

Now James deals with the *identification of faith*. Saving faith can be recognized and identified by certain spiritual fingerprints. There is a verification of genuine faith. James gives us this practical illustration—<sup>36</sup>

#### InDepth—Faith and Works

The great reformer Martin Luther, champion of the doctrine of salvation through faith alone, never felt good about the epistle of James. He called it an “epistle full of straw” in the preface to his 1522 edition of the New Testament, and he put the book in the appendix. He preferred Paul’s wording of the faith-works equation: “A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28).

In a sense, Luther had little choice. He was surrounded by men who said that good works could save you. He knew that God alone could save through faith alone, and his mission was to tell them.

But Luther went too far, when he put James in the appendix to the New Testament. Neither faith nor works can be cut off and thrown away. James was taking aim at freeloaders, those who claimed to have no need for good deeds since they had faith. The reality is that if you have faith, works will naturally be a product. You cannot get rid of

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<sup>36</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

works just because they do not save you. You cannot sever the effect from the cause. Just as an apple tree will bear apples, so faith will produce good works (see Luke 6:43, 44). Paul had the opposite problem in view when he wrote Romans. His letter targeted those who placed their faith in the Law of Moses. Their trust was in their own good works, and not in God. That is why Paul wrote a defense of faith, and that is why Luther preferred it to James's defense of works.

Faith and works are not enemies. True faith and righteous works go hand in hand. They are two parts of God's work in us. Faith brings a person to salvation, and works bring that person to faithfulness. Faith is the cause, works are the effect. James believed it, and so did Paul.<sup>37</sup>

**Chuck Smith:** Now at this point many people see James and Paul in conflict in teaching. I don't. Paul teaches that salvation is through faith, faith alone. "By grace are you saved through faith; not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Then what does James say, Can faith save him? The answer is yes, faith can save him. A true faith. But make sure you have a true faith. For if you have a true faith, it will be manifested by the works. In other words, to just say you have faith doesn't cut it. Saying it isn't enough.

I've had people come to me and say, "Oh, I have all the faith in the world." Baloney! Nobody has all the faith in the world. And saying it doesn't make it so. If you believe certain things to be so, then your life is going to be lived accordingly. And so your life testifies of your faith or your beliefs. And to say that you believe in God and that God is supreme and that God is first in your life, then it will follow that there will be certain evidence that will verify that fact that you have declared to be so. And by the works that you do your faith will be proved or proclaimed. And to say that you have faith and not have any works that correspond is totally wrong. You've deceived yourself. You aren't really walking in faith. If you are truly walking in faith, your works are going to be manifesting that truth.

So "what does it profit if a man says he has faith, and he doesn't have works? can that kind of faith save him?" No, it can't.<sup>38</sup>

Like a good teacher, James starts his argument with a pair of questions. The implication of his question, a point he will continue to defend, is that faith without works is not a saving faith. James is literally asking, "This type of faith cannot save, can it?, expecting a negative answer.

We will see in this argument the contrast between faith and belief. One can believe in Jesus and not have faith in Him. Many people believe that Jesus existed, and may even believe that all of the content of scripture is true, and in that belief they think themselves Christians. However, such belief does not have the power to save, as we will soon see. A testimony that is based solely on belief is not a saving testimony, and the fruit of the Spirit will not be evident in this individual's life.

Is James implying that works have the power to save? Then the last clause of this verse is taken out of context and the original language is ignored, it is possible to come to this

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<sup>37</sup> The Nelson Study Bible

<sup>38</sup> Chuck Smith, Notes on James, Pastor Calvary Church, Costa Mesa CA

conclusion. How do we reconcile James and Paul on this issue? Paul refers to a different type of works. To Paul, a work is an action following the law of Moses, by those who valued themselves highly on this basis alone. James refers to an action which is prompted by God's love in your heart. An action which must be restrained by worldliness to be held back. They are part of the necessary effects and fruits of sound belief in and understanding of the gospel and God who gave it to us. Paul illustrates the insufficiency of the works of the law while James shows the genuine and necessary works that are the product of true Christian faith.

Furthermore, Paul and James were addressing opposite problems. Paul was addressing those who felt justified by their works under the Mosaic law and did not lean on a concept of faith in the Lord Jesus at all. James was addressing those who felt justified by an incomplete concept of faith and did not, therefore, point to works as part of it. Where the former Jews depended upon works of the law, the latter Jews depended upon belief. Both are dramatic errors that result only in permanent separation from God. When Paul addresses the faith/works function that James is considering his response is in total agreement.<sup>39</sup>

### **James 2:15**

#### **If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,**

As believer we have an obligation to help meet the needs of people.

Gal 6:10 - "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all *men*, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Matt 25:40 - "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me."

**Clarke: If a brother or sister be naked**—That is, ill-clothed; for naked, has this meaning in several parts of the New Testament, signifying bad clothing, or the want of some particular article of dress. See Matthew 25:36, 38, 43, 44, and John 21:7. It has the same comparative signification in most languages.

The rhetorical question is followed by a hypothetical but realistic illustration: **Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.** (James frequently wrote about the poor: 1:9, 27; 2:2-6, 15.) For one in need of the basics of life, sentimental good wishes do little good, like the common Jewish farewell, **Go, I wish you well** (lit., "Go in peace," cf. Jud. 18:6; 1 Sam. 1:17; 2 Sam. 15:9; Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50). If nothing is done to fill the pressing need for warm clothes and satisfying food, **what good is it?** The same phrase that James used to introduce this paragraph (James 2:14) is repeated for emphasis.<sup>40</sup>

Before answering his question, James gives an illustration. Presented is an example of one making contact with another individual who is in need. James uses two hyperboles

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

<sup>40</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:15–16). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

"naked" and "destitute" to emphasize the dire need of the individual being referred to. This is not someone who simply needs a coat, or a meal, but someone who is in drastic need. How would you respond to meeting such an individual?

Few people have never experienced such a contact. One cannot travel in any of the world's cities without encountering the poor and homeless who are begging for gifts of food, money, or other needs. In James' example, however, he adds one other feature to the situation: the one in need is a brother or sister, one who is close in relationship and not simply a stranger on the street. How would you respond to such an individual? Our answer to that question reveals something of our nature.<sup>41</sup>

### **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?**

People with dead faith substitute words for authenticating deeds. They know the correct vocabulary for prayer, testimony, etc.

“Be warmed and filled”? 1 John 3:17-19.

**1 John 3:17-19** <sup>17</sup>But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? <sup>18</sup>My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. <sup>19</sup>And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

**McGee:** Pious clichés and Christian verbiage are not the evidence of saving faith. There must be a vocation to go along with the vocabulary. You can be very pious and say to an individual, “Brother, I will pray for you, and I know the Lord will provide.” My friend, the Lord put *you* there as a child of God to do the providing. I get a little weary sometimes when wealthy Christian laymen pat me on the back and say, “Dr. McGee, you are doing a fine thing. You are doing the right thing in giving out the Word of God,” but they do not have a part in supporting this ministry financially. I have a hard time believing they are sincere. You may piously say to someone, “Oh, brother, I’m for you.” *Are you for him? Are you back of him?* My friend, a living faith *produces* something—you can identify it.

The Lord Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). Then in Romans 13:8, Paul says, “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” The point is that you cannot say you are a child of God and live like a lawless individual. I do not mean that whenever a bum asks you for twenty-five cents in order to buy wine you should give it to him. And I do not think that you should believe every individual who professes to be a Christian. We need to test them out to see whether they are or not. My heart is warmed when I think of a certain man I know who is rendering financial assistance to someone in need and of a lady of means who is supporting a missionary

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<sup>41</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

abroad and telling no one about it. May I say to you, you are telling by your life whether your faith is genuine or not.<sup>42</sup>

The phrase translated, "Depart in peace" is a common idiom, *hypagete en irene*, or "go in peace." It is a common Hebrew farewell. As a common idiom, it would be easily stated without any true thought or concern. It is much like the English idiom, "How do you do?", asked as a polite gesture with no real desire for an answer. In some areas of the US, the idiom has been reduced to a simple "Howdy" with few people even realizing what it means. James is referring to a similar, almost meaningless, phrase.

"Be ye warmed ..." places the responsibility on the restoration of the destitute individual on themselves. Modern English might be something like, "I hope that you find warmth and food." Yet, even still there is no true hope.

We have a person in close relationship and in dire need, and the response of the person who claims to have faith is simply to state a few meaningless and powerless words, with no intent of providing assistance. What has such a response proven? What we find is that the person claiming faith has no love. There is no fruit of compassion. Christians will often reject the pleas of the homeless when a street confrontation takes place because of fears of personal safety. Even when this takes place the Christian will feel some level of disappointment as the Holy Spirit convicts. If this person were someone close, as James' example implies, there would be no such fear, and a Christian would step in and help without a second thought. In this instance, the needs of the destitute individual are met, love is expressed, and a blessing is received by all involved. That is quite a contrast to the vanity of the response of James' example.<sup>43</sup>

## **James 2:17**

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

**John Calvin:** "It is faith alone [*sola fide*] that justifies, but faith that justifies is never alone."

Faith without the authenticating actions is vain.

**[being alone]** Faith without works is dead; works without faith is dead (James 2:17,20,26). Neither is complete in itself. It is like fire burning without fuel and fuel burning without fire. One can say that this is possible, but it is not; it is contrary to the creative makeup and the laws that govern fire and fuel.

We cannot earn our salvation by serving and obeying God. But such actions show that our commitment to God is real. Deeds of loving service are not a substitute for, but rather a verification of, our faith in Christ.

The vain boast, **faith by itself**, or faith in and of itself with no evidence of **action, is dead**. Workless faith is worthless faith; it is unproductive, sterile, barren, dead! Great

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<sup>42</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

claims may be made about a corpse that is supposed to have come to life, but if it does not move, if there are no vital signs, no heartbeat, no perceptible pulse, it is still dead. The false claims are silenced by the evidence.<sup>44</sup>

In the previous chapter, James was referring to dead religion, and now he exposes how such a dead religion produces a dead faith. Many people profess faith. Still, if one does a survey of the United States, the majority of the people will profess faith in God. The majority of these will profess to be Christians. However, many of those who profess Christianity have never actually placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. It is not until such a profession of faith in Christ takes place does the Holy Spirit of God come and reside in one's heart. It is not until then that the individual's life is characterized by true agape love. Without true faith, there is no love, and there is no fruit of the Spirit. James describes such a faith as a dead faith. Death does not mean an end, but a separation. A dead faith is one that is separated from a relationship with God, and is not the type of faith that saves. One who claims to be a Christian but has not turned to Christ and appropriated His power in their lives stands separated from God, alone for eternity.

Often those Christians who have not turned to Christ as Savior and Lord are the most difficult to convince of their error. They fully believe in Jesus, so they think they are fully saved from eternal separation from God, from hell. James will shortly show the folly of this false faith.<sup>45</sup>

### **James 2:18**

**Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.**

James is repudiating any separation of faith alone or in deeds alone, as if they were contradictory.

Mere intellectual assent is inadequate. One may know the doctrines of salvation, but yet has not yet submitted himself to God.

3X: James warns that “faith without works is dead.” (2:17, 20, 26)

**LAN:** At first glance, this verse seems to contradict Romans 3:28, “man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” Deeper investigation, however, shows that the teachings of James and Paul are not at odds. While it is true that our good deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good deeds. Paul speaks against those who try to be saved by deeds instead of true faith; James speaks against those who confuse mere intellectual assent with true faith. After all, even demons

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<sup>44</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:17). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

know who Jesus is, but they don't obey him (James 2:19). True faith involves a commitment of your whole self to God.

**McGee:** "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead." The faith is dead? Why? Because living faith, saving faith, produces works. You have to draw that conclusion from James' illustration. He is talking about the fruit of faith. Paul talks about the root of faith. Those are the separate emphases of each man, but both Paul and James say that faith alone saves. Paul also says that faith is going to produce fruit—"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace ..." (Gal. 5:22). The Lord Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ..." (John 15:5).

A minister once talked to a man who professed conversion, and he asked, "Have you united with the church?" "No, I haven't," the man replied. "The dying thief never united with the church, and he went to heaven." The minister asked, "Have you ever sat at the Lord's table?" "No, the dying thief never did, and he was accepted" was the answer. The minister asked, "Have you been baptized?" "No," he said, "the dying thief was never baptized, and he went to heaven." "Have you given to missions?" "No, the dying thief did not give to missions, and he was not judged for it" was the reply. Then this disgusted minister said to the man, "Well, my friend, the difference between you two seems to be that he was a dying thief and you are a living thief."

My friend, we often sing, "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise," but we do not even use the one tongue we have. And we sing, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small," and then we give nothing at all to Him. James says it is faith that saves, but saving faith produces something.<sup>46</sup>

**JNTC: But someone will say that you have faith and I have actions.** Ya'akov introduces an imaginary third party, "**someone**," coming to defend an imaginary "**you**" who answers "Yes" to the questions of v. 14 and believes that intellectual faith without good works can save him: **someone will say that you** are the one who has genuine **faith, and that I, Ya'akov, have** only **actions** without faith and am trying to save myself by my works (which would indeed contradict Sha'ul at Ro 3:28). My answer to "**you**" (and indirectly to "**someone**") is: **Show me this faith of yours without the actions!** You won't be able to, since genuine faith is perceived not through talk, but through the deeds that issue from it. However, for my part, I, Ya'akov, **will show you my faith by my actions**, and you will have to conclude that I am not trying to save myself by my works; rather, my works grow out of my faith and prove that it is genuine faith. Introducing imaginary adversaries is a recognized strategy in Jewish pedagogy; see practically anywhere in the Talmud. For an extended example in Sha'ul's writing, see Ro 10:14–11:11 and Ro 10:14–15N.<sup>47</sup>

James contrasts the fruit (or lack thereof) of these two types of faith. As Jesus said, "A City on a hill cannot be hidden." James states this in a different and more personal way. "If I have the love of Christ in me, just look at me and watch what I do." We know true Christians by their love. If one claims to have faith, but does not have love, then the Spirit

<sup>46</sup> McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>47</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:18). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

of Christ is not in them. When we see the Spirit of Christ in the life of a Christian, we can know that they own true faith.

The primary problem being addressed by James is the same problem keeping those who call themselves Christians from actually turning to Christ in saving faith. Our Christian churches today are filled with sincere and caring people who believe in Jesus Christ, and believe that all that they have heard of Him from scripture is true. It is that belief that they lean on when they call themselves "Christians". However, the scripture never states, "Believe in Jesus and you will be saved." Scripture always refers either to the "Name of Jesus" or the "Lord Jesus." This dramatic error is pointed out in the next verse.<sup>48</sup>

### **James 2:19**

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

Are demons real? Indeed; and the church has rediscovered the reality and activity of demons. Eph 6:10-18.

Yet demons "have faith!" There is not a demon in the universe who is an atheist! Some demons have better theology than we do!

They believe in the existence of God; they are neither atheists or agnostics! They believe in the deity of Christ. They even "witnessed" of Him: Whenever they met Christ when He was on the earth, they bore witness to His Sonship (Mk 3:11-12; Mt 8:29-34; Lk 8:26-37). They knew, and acknowledged, the existence of a place of punishment (Lk 8:31; Mt 8:29); They recognized Jesus Christ as the Judge (Mk 5:1-13).

They submit to the power of His Word. They were not just touched in their intellect, they were touched in their emotions: "*they believe and tremble.*"

It is not a confirming experience to just tremble [or roll on the ground and bark...].

A person can be enlightened in his mind and stirred in his heart and still be lost forever.

True saving faith involves something more, something that can be seen and recognized: a changed life. (v.18) Hell will have its share of monotheists, Trinitarians, orthodox, and the *lost*.<sup>49</sup>

Believing in God is no proof that you are justified by faith alone, for even devils believe without justification.

**Chuck Smith:** "Oh, I believe in God." Big deal. Who doesn't, except some fool? The Bible says the fool is the one that says there is no God. So you say you believe in God, it only proves one thing, you're not a fool. But it doesn't save you. The devils believe in God, they probably believe more firmly in Him than you do. They said to Jesus, "We know who you are, you're the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). So you say, "Oh I believe Jesus is the holy One of God." So what? Have you submitted your life to His lordship? Are you doing His works? Are you obeying His commands?

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<sup>48</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

<sup>49</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on James, khouse.org

You see, not all who say, Lord, Lord, are going to enter the kingdom of heaven. So you say, "Oh Lord, Oh the Lord, Oh the Lord," yea, yea, but saying is not going to do it. Jesus said, "not all who say, Lord, Lord, are going to enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of the Father" (Matthew 7:21). James is telling you the very same thing. It isn't saying I have faith, it is demonstrating the faith because of the works of my life are in harmony with what I am declaring that I believe.

If I believe that there was a bomb planted in this room, set to detonate in two minutes, and I'd stand up here and calmly proclaim to you, "You know, huge bomb in this room going to detonate in two minutes and blow this whole place to smithereens." Terrible of people to do that, isn't it? Can't imagine the mind of a person that would plant such a bomb. Why would they want to destroy us? You'd say, "Ah, you don't really believe there's a bomb here." Why? Because my works don't correspond with what I'm declaring that I believe. But if I go running out of the door and say, "Get out of there, you know. Bomb's going to blow up in two minutes," you know, then you're more apt to believe that at least I believe what I'm telling you because now my actions are corresponding with what I am declaring that I believe to be so.

Now the same is true. You say, "Well I believe in God and I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and all." Well, do your actions correspond? Do your actions really show that Jesus is the Lord of your life? Is that demonstrated by the works that you do? That's what James is saying. Don't just say it. Don't rest in just words, beautiful words. But let's see the actions that demonstrate that you truly believe what you're saying.

A faith based upon belief alone is a faith of the devils. Believing there is a God, or even believing all that is in the scriptures is true does not distinguish us from the devil. Satan knows that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, that He is the Promised Messiah who was born of a virgin, was crucified, died, and rose again to sit at the "right hand" of the Father. If Satan believes all this to be true, and you believe all this to be true, what is the difference between you and Satan? The tragedy is that the demons tremble in fear of an eternity in hell, separated from the love of God, and those who exhibit a false faith do not. Thinking that their false faith will save them, such folks see no need for change, and have no fear of a hell that they think they will avoid.

Again, James is talking to those who call themselves Christians, but cannot be separated from Satan using this argument. If one bases their Christianity on belief alone, one is no closer to God than Satan himself. The difference has to do with what the individual does with that belief. Salvation is not by belief, but by faith alone.

What is faith? I can believe that a chair will hold my weight, but I have not expressed faith until I sit in it. Faith is putting belief into an action that makes us dependant upon the object of our belief. Placing faith in Jesus Christ means that, upon believing what we have seen and heard, we will trust Jesus to be our Lord and Savior. Just as we trust the chair to hold us, we trust in Jesus Christ as Lord. If Jesus is your Lord, then, you will seek to be obedient to Him. Such a concept is alien to one who has not made such a profession, but is the natural and easy response to those who have.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

## **James 2:20**

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

No fruit; no earnings on His investment.

“Useless” : *ergon*, works, *arge*, useless.

Faith that has no works does not work. James emphasizes that real faith and works are inseparable.

These are questions 8-11 in the Book of James. The next questions are in James 3:11. Are you willing to be instructed as to the nature of true saving faith?

## **James 2:21**

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

Gen 12, 15, 22... Abraham was spiritually bankrupt; but God added to his account: Gen 15:6. [First mention of “believe.”]

Justification (in the declarative sense) is not a process: it is an act. It is not something that the sinner does; it is something God does for the sinner.

But how can you tell if a person is justified (in a demonstrative sense) by faith? By a changed life and obedience to God’s will. Gen 22 demonstrated that Abraham was already saved. (More than 30 years after Genesis 15:6.)

Abraham was confident they would return together: (v. 4, 5; Heb 11:19; cf. vv 17,18).

**[justified by works]** Two examples of justification by faith and works, not works only (James 2:21-26):

1. Abraham (James 2:21-24; Genesis 22)
2. Rahab (James 2:25; Joshua 2 and Joshua 6)

**(Dake) [when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar]** It is clear from Genesis 22 that Abraham proved his faith in God when he was asked to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. It was faith that led him to this act of obedience (James 2:23). Had he refused to obey, it would have demonstrated that he had no faith in God or His Word. It is also clear that this act of faith and works was not his initial justification by faith. That was at least 40 to 50 years before offering Isaac (Genesis 12:1-4; Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1-6).

**LAN:** James says that Abraham was “considered righteous” for what he *did*. Paul says he was justified because he *believed* God (Romans 4:1-5). James and Paul are not contradicting but complementing each other. Let’s not conclude that the truth is a blending of these two statements. We are not justified by what we do in any way. True faith always results in deeds, but the deeds do not justify us. Faith brings us salvation; active obedience demonstrates that our faith is genuine.

As a final proof of his thesis, James gave two biblical examples: Abraham, the revered patriarch, and Rahab, the redeemed prostitute. He presented each example in the form of a question, anticipating the reader's ready agreement.<sup>51</sup>

**Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?** This question is often held to be directly opposed to Paul's statement that Abraham's faith, not his works, caused God to declare him righteous (Rom. 4:1-5). Paul, however, was arguing for the *priority* of faith. James argued for the *proof* of faith. Paul declared that Abraham had faith, and was therefore justified, or declared righteous (Gen. 15:6), prior to circumcision (Gen. 17:11; cf. Rom. 4:9). James explained that Abraham's faith was evident in his practice of Isaac's sacrifice (Gen. 22:12), and he was therefore justified, or declared righteous. Works serve as the barometer of justification, while faith is the basis for justification.<sup>52</sup>

**JNTC: Avraham avinu ... offered up his son Yitzchak**, Genesis 22:1–19. See MJ 11:17–19&NN.

Abraham was **declared righteous because of actions**. On this Yechiel Lichtenstein writes (with my comments in brackets),  
“It means that his faith was revealed through his actions, as is immediately explained in the following verse; and this corresponds to Genesis 22:12, ‘Now I know that you fear God.’ See the Ramban’s commentary there. [The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Ben-Nachman, Nachmanides, 12th century) wrote that God was already aware of Abraham’s faith in potentiality, but his willingness to sacrifice Isaac made Abraham’s faith concrete and brought him to full merit before God.] Paul said in Ro 4:2, ‘For if Abraham came to be considered righteous by God because of works, then he has something to boast about. But this is not how it is before God.’ The meaning is that Paul interprets the words, ‘I know’ in Genesis 22:12 as Rashi does, that God can now glorify himself with Abraham before mankind. [Rashi commented, ‘ “Now I know” —henceforth I have something to answer Satan and the nations who wonder what is my love towards you. Now I have a point of attack, for they see “that you fear God.” ’] But in any case, Paul admits that Abraham was declared righteous because of his actions—as written in Genesis 26:5, ‘Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, commandments, statutes and laws.’ This is what the Holy One, blessed be he, said to Isaac.” (*Commentary to the New Testament, ad loc.*)<sup>53</sup>

The word translated "vain" is more accurately rendered "foolish" in modern English. James refers to the one of false faith as being foolish: presented with the truth and the facts but rejecting them because of pride and self-serving attitudes. How much proof does one need? Do you need another example?

Like other New Testament writers<sup>[5]</sup> James turns to the life of Abraham as an example of a man with true faith. We find recorded in Genesis Abraham's offering of Isaac as a

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<sup>51</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:20). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>52</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:21). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>53</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:21). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

sacrifice as a response to God's simple command to do so.<sup>[6]</sup> Often people misunderstand this incident and think that God truly wanted Abraham to think that he was to kill his own son. However, Abraham's faith was in God's promises. One such promise was that, through Isaac, there come a mighty nation of people. If God was true to his promise, Isaac would not be killed. God would find a way to save Isaac. Abraham fully believed this, and though he certainly have had doubts that brought him much anguish, like all Christians do when they analyze their faith, Abraham went so far as to build the altar, place Isaac on it, and raise the knife. Abraham's faith was not so much rewarded, as it was proven when God provided an alternate sacrifice, a spotless ram caught in a nearby thicket. Abraham did not appropriate saving faith by keeping of the Mosaic law: it was written about 400 years later. Abraham simply put his full trust in God, and followed Him in obedience. This is saving faith: to put our full trust in God and follow Him in obedience. Jesus becomes our Lord. We take ourselves off of the throne of our lives and place God there.<sup>54</sup>

### **James 2:22**

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

Jesus taught that one recognizes trees by their fruit. Matt 7:15-20; 12:33-37.

**Clarke: Seest thou how faith wrought**—Here is a proof that faith cannot exist without being active in works of righteousness. His faith in God would have been of no avail to him, had it not been manifested by works; for by works—by his obedience to the commands of God, his faith was made perfect—it dictated obedience, he obeyed; and thus faith had its consummation. Even true faith will soon die, if its possessor do not live in the spirit of obedience.

### **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.**

He was declared righteous by faith: Rom 4:1-5; Gal 3:6,7. This was 14 years before circumcision (Gen 17); and hundreds of years before the law!

**Dake: [Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness]**

Quoted from Genesis 15:6 which was many years before offering Isaac as in Genesis 22. Thus, every act of obedience is an act of faith and works combined to maintain justification before God.

**Dake{ [Friend of God]** The greatest blessing possible is to be a friend of God.

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<sup>54</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

**JNTC: God’s friend.** A friend is not one who merely declares his loyalty but who proves it by his deeds. On the subject of friendship Yeshua told his *talmidim*, “No one has greater love than a person who lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you” (Yn 15:13–14). Abraham’s offering his son Isaac resembles God’s offering his son Yeshua (see Yn 3:16).<sup>55</sup>

Why did Abraham go ahead with the sacrifice? Obedience to God was a natural and normal response for him. We can see the faith of Abraham by his love for God as demonstrated in the things he did. Just as he had instructed that people look at his own life to see true faith, he shows how we can look at others, like Abraham, to see the same contrast between false and true faith. By his actions, his faith was shown to be complete. There were many other incidences in Abraham's life where he showed his consistent love for, and obedience to, God. The life of a true Christian will show a similar consistency of love for God as demonstrated by obedience to Him. This is what separates the belief of Satan from the faith of a true Christian.<sup>56</sup>

### **James 2:24**

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

By faith Abraham was justified before God and his righteousness declared; by works he was justified before men and his righteousness demonstrated.

D.L. Moody: “Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather.”

Titus 1:16: “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny *him*, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”

Gandi: [Q: What is the biggest obstacle to Christianity in India?  
A: “Christians.”]

**[only]** The whole passage emphasizes faith with works—not faith only or works only. Even Paul did not teach justification by faith only, for he also taught works whereby Christians should demonstrate their faith (James 2:14).

**Clarke: Ye see then how**—It is evident from this example that Abraham’s faith was not merely believing that there is a God; but a principle that led him to credit God’s promises relative to the future Redeemer, and to implore God’s mercy: this he received, and was justified by faith. His faith now began to work by love, and therefore he was found ever obedient to the will of his Maker. He brought forth the fruits of righteousness; and his works justified—proved the genuineness of his faith; and he continued to enjoy the Divine approbation, which he could not have done had he not been thus obedient; for the

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<sup>55</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:23). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

<sup>56</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

Spirit of God would have been grieved, and his principle of faith would have perished. Obedience to God is essentially requisite to maintain faith. Faith lives, under God, by works; and works have their being and excellence from faith. Neither can subsist without the other, and this is the point which St. James labors to prove, in order to convince the Antinomians of his time that their faith was a delusion, and that the hopes built on it must needs perish.

**Spurgeon:** Faith alone justifies, but not a faith which is alone and without works.

Taken out of context, this verse might appear contradictory to Paul's insistence on salvation by faith alone. However, we are tripped up a little by the Greek grammar used in this phrase. James had indicated that works are the completion of true faith (verse 22), and are a natural fruit of it. Works are the evidence of saving faith, the evidence of justification. Paul also expressed that good works are the fruit of true faith. James is not saying that works justifies. However, a complete and perfect faith is made evident by good works that are based on the spontaneous expression of the agape love of God.<sup>57</sup>

### **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?**

Joshua 2 and 6. Heb 11:31. [The Hebrew word for “harlot” can have a wider meaning of “an innkeeper.” However, the Greek word in James 2:25 and Hebrew 11:31 indicates an immoral person. Yet she becomes the mother of Boaz and is the genealogy of our Lord.]

Rahab was the opposite extreme from Abraham, a respected prominent patriarch:

- 1) She was Gentile;
- 2) She was a prostitute;
- 3) She was a comparatively minor figure in the OT.

Hebrews 11 - “the Hall of Faith” is also the “Hall of Works”: vv. 4, 7, 20, 22, 24, 25, 29...

**[Rahab the harlot justified by works]** Rahab was also justified by her works and her faith when she hid the spies with peace (Joshua 2; Hebrews 11:31).

**Rachav the prostitute.** See Joshua 2:8–21, 6:25. She is also mentioned at MJ 11:31 as one of the heroines of faith; and her example is even more striking than that of Abraham, for her works prior to her “conversion” were unarguably wicked. Mekhilta to Exodus 18:1 reports that she had been a prostitute for forty years from age 10, but then she joined herself to the Jewish people and became a proselyte. Her faith was genuine, for she not only affirmed the God of Israel (Joshua 2:11), but did actions demonstrating her faith **when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another route.** This was the

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<sup>57</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)

beginning of a complete change of lifestyle. Mattityahu 1:5 names her as an ancestor of Yeshua the Messiah.<sup>58</sup>

**Spurgeon:** In any and every case suitable works attend upon saving faith, and it is idle to claim to be saved by faith, unless our lives are holy.

James' second example is one of self-denial. However, the individual is not respected for a life of righteousness, but rather this example is a woman, and she may be a prostitute. Together, she would be very low on the social ladder, as opposed to Abraham how sits at the top of the Hebrew Social Food Chain.. This shows early of evidence how faith saves those who are low in our human eyes. Note, however, we shouldn't push the harlot issue too hard since the word rendered prostitute can also be rendered "hostess". This latter translation fits the context wherein she was running a public house in the city wall. Upon hearing of Israel's God she believed in His presence and acted upon it to the risk of her own peril.

### **James 2:26**

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

Dead: meaningless; useless; powerless; lifeless counterfeit. An imposter. Luke 12:48: For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.

**Dake: [body without the spirit is dead]** Only the body dies at the time of physical death. This is caused by the soul and spirit leaving the body. The body returns to dust and the soul and spirit of the righteous go to heaven to await the resurrection (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-24; Hebrews 12:23; Rev. 6:9-11). The soul and spirit of the wicked go to hell to await the resurrection (Luke 16:19-31; Isaiah 14:9; Rev. 20:11-15). The soul and spirit are spiritual and immortal. They cannot go back to dust. See Twenty-five Proofs of the Immortality of the Soul, and See Three Kinds of Death in Scripture.

**[so faith without works is dead also]** Just as surely as the inner man leaves the body at physical death and is no longer with the body, so faith without works is dead (separated) and is powerless.

The conclusion is most clear. **Faith** and **deeds** are as essential to each other as **the body** and **the spirit**. Apart from (*chōris*) the spirit, or the "breath" (*pneumatōs*) of life, the body **is dead**. Apart from (*chōris*) the evidence of works, faith may be deemed **dead**. It is *not* the real thing. True faith continually contributes to spiritual growth and development.

Not only is a believer to stand confidently on God's Word even in the midst of trials and temptations (chap. 1), but also he must serve his brothers and sisters in Christ (chap. 2). He is to accept all members of God's family without favoritism (vv. 1-13) and to aid

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<sup>58</sup> Stern, D. H. (1996). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Jas 2:25). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

the family with a working faith (vv. 14-26). To gain spiritual maturity a believer must be what God wants him to be and do what God wants him to do.<sup>59</sup>

**14–26** Many skeptics argue that a contradiction exists between Paul’s statement that “a man is justified by faith apart from works” (Rm 3:28; cp. 4:5–6; Gl 2:16) and the teaching of James that “a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (Jms 2:24). However, these positions actually complement one other.

First, Paul and James addressed different situations. On the one hand, Paul refuted a Jewish legalism holding that one must observe the law’s requirements in order to be saved. On the other hand, James opposed an antinomianism that was twisting faith in Christ so much that no expression of works was necessary.

Second, when Paul used the word “justified,” he meant “saved” or “declared righteous,” whereas James meant “vindicated” or “authenticated.” By “works,” Paul meant “works of the law,” whereas James meant works that faith produces.

In the light of the above, Paul was saying that one is declared righteous by God apart from the works of the law. James, by contrast, was saying that a person’s faith produces works that vindicate his faith in Christ as genuine. James used Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac (vv. 21–23; cp. Gn 22:9) and Rahab’s protection of the spies (Jms 2:25; cp. Jos 2) as examples to show that their works authenticated the reality of their faith in God. For James, faith without works was clearly worthless; it must be more than words (Jms 2:14–19, 26). Authentic faith will bear the fruit of good works.<sup>60</sup>

**Chuck Smith:** When your spirit leaves your body, your body is dead. The body without the spirit, dead. So faith, if it doesn't have corresponding works, is not a true faith. It's dead. It does nothing for you. It cannot save you. Dead faith can save no one. It's a living faith and a living Lord and that living faith can be demonstrated by the actions of my life that are in harmony and corresponding with what I declare to be true and what I declare I believe to be true. There has to be the corresponding works for faith to be alive.

Therefore, let us examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith, the true faith that saves. Not just the verbalizing of the Apostle's Creed. I believe but the actions of my life being in harmony with it.

Father, help us that we might indeed be doers of the word and not hearers only. That we might not just affirm a belief but may we demonstrate that belief by the attitudes and actions of our lives. Lord, help us not to be deceived. In Jesus' name, Amen.

May the Lord bless you and guide you as you go this week. As you face the many temptations, may the Lord give you strength and may you walk and live after the Spirit. And may you respond after the Spirit. In the temptation may you not yield to the flesh and react after the flesh. May your life be pleasing unto God, as our actions come into

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<sup>59</sup> Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Jas 2:26). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>60</sup> Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (1843). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

harmony with our declarations of what we believe. May we show it in the works that we do. In Jesus' name.

The best of works, without faith, are dead and are profitable for nothing in regards to God's will and work, and are no indicator of an individual's eternal state. Any good work we do in faith is done with a focus on God and our true desire to do His will because His love in us prompts us to do it: Not simply because a book of law (printed or not) says so. A dead faith is one that is not based upon an acceptance of the Lordship of Christ, and is characterized by the lack of the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the "believer." Belief alone does not produce living faith, but rather an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, a decision that results in a transformation which spontaneously generates the good works that James describes.

It may be profitable at this time to examine your own state. Do you consider yourself a Christian because you believe in Jesus Christ? Remember, Satan believes and shall be separated from God from eternity. Since you believe, and Satan believes, what is the difference between you and Satan? Satan refuses to accept the Lordship of Jesus, choosing to be his own authority. Many Christians make this same mistake, refusing to turn to God through Jesus Christ. Or is your acceptance of Jesus as Lord a partial acceptance, giving authority to Jesus Christ in some areas of your life and not others. If this is the case, you have not accepted Jesus as Lord, because if He is not Lord of All, He is not Lord at all. Jesus is either your Lord, or He is not.

If you have not accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of your life, your faith is dead. Take a moment and correct this error for eternity through a simple prayer: Acknowledge to God that you have sinned and have been rejecting His Lordship, sincerely ask for His Holy Spirit to help you to repent (turn back) from this sin, ask for His promised forgiveness, and commit your life to God through your newly found faith in Jesus Christ who is, indeed, your Savior and Lord.

If you are a Christian who seeks to live a life of obedience, are you hiding the light of God's love?<sup>[8]</sup> If Jesus is Lord, than you will seek to be obedient to Him by letting your light shine. God can give you the courage to express His love in your life. Turn back to Him and watch your faith work.<sup>61</sup>

<b>Contrasts Between Paul and James</b>		
	<b>Paul</b>	<b>James</b>
<b>Concern</b>	Legalists	Libertines
<b>Emphasis</b>	Justification with God by faith	Justification (vindication) before men by works
<b>Perspective</b>	Faith as a gift	Faith as genuine
<b>Result</b>	Justified as an eternal position by believing in Christ	Justified in daily proof by behaving like Christ

<sup>61</sup> [http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59\\_00\\_00.html](http://www.biblicaltheology.com/jam/59_00_00.html)