

**Introduction:** In chapter 1, James discussed several practical themes including steadfastly enduring life's trials and temptations (1:2-8), true riches and true poverty compared to worldly riches and poverty (1:9-11), the urgent need to be doers of the word and not hearers only (1:22-26), guarding the tongue (1:26), and investing in those who likely can never repay (1:27). These examples illustrate authentic faith. In chapter 2, James elaborates on these and other matters of living in faith every day.

**James 2:1-13:** *"My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.<sup>2</sup> For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,<sup>3</sup> and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet,"<sup>4</sup> have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?<sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?<sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court?<sup>7</sup> Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?<sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.<sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.<sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.<sup>11</sup> For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.<sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.<sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."*

**Partiality and Prejudice:** These verses are aimed at faulty thinking which can lead to holding an attitude of partiality and/or prejudice. In 2:1, James gives the correct principle that believers should show no partiality. In 2:5-22 he immediately

follows with an illustration from real life comparing different reactions to people who enter their assembly. There should be no difference in the treatment of a wealthy man and a poor man, but that is often not the case. Such behavior is inconsistent with true faith. Verses 2: 12-13 concludes the teaching with an exhortation to do right.

It is unacceptable for believers to have an attitude of personal favoritism which causes them to show partiality in dealing with other believers. Our response to people is often dominated by first impressions based on appearance and a few exchanged comments. Jesus says that, in order to gain insight into a person's moral nature, it is necessary to observe the "fruit" they produce. That requires time and effort. God knows moral nature directly, but we can't. Moral nature is an inner person characteristic that cannot be discerned from a person's external appearance and/or status in society. But the things they say and do over a period of time give some insight into their moral nature.

1 Samuel 16:7b says, ***"For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."*** God looks at the innermost person, seeing the content of the heart. People can see only external consequences of a person's inner reality. Jesus says by their fruit (externally observable events) you will know them. What people say and do and what they avoid saying and doing reveal something about the moral nature of their "inner person."

Prejudice means to "pre-judge." "Pre-judgment" tends to be based on insufficient knowledge. Showing partiality is most often based on external facts – wealth, power, position in the community, the clothes they wear, and so forth. Jesus says think about how you want people to view and treat you? He says, ***"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."*** Martin Luther King, Jr. was absolutely right in saying he wanted his children to be judged by the content of their character (an inner-person truth), not the color of their skin (an externally observable fact). Using skin color or any other outward characteristic to prejudge a person's moral character is wrong. We are to judge as we would prefer to be judged.

**Impartiality in Dealing with Others:** Some commentators take James comments to mean say James all people should be treated equally. That sounds good, but what does it actually mean? Does it mean equal opportunity, equal benefits and

results, or something else? Whatever is meant by “treating everyone equally,” James comments are about impartiality, a somewhat different concept from equality. James concept of impartiality is most likely based on Scripture’s insistence that God is impartial and no respecter of persons. Impartiality is not equality in any sense except one. Impartial means unbiased or without prejudice, showing no favoritism.

**God’s Impartiality:** God’s impartiality is demonstrated in that His rules, requirements, and commands are the same for each and every person. King or beggar, wealthy merchant or laborer, teacher or pupil, great athlete or street sweeper, no status changes the rules. All are subject to the same rules.

All have failed to obey God’s rules and know it. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All are under God’s condemnation for their sin. There is no way to change that dreadful situation except to come to the Father through Christ the Son and receive God’s salvation. Does God have a special place in His heart for His redeemed and special plans for their future? Yes! Is that an inappropriate partiality? No! Redemption is available and offered to all to receive or reject.

When James says believers are not to show partiality, he means not making inappropriate distinctions between fellow believers. Distinction based on external appearance is an example, as is race, manner of speech, and position in society.

Belief is a matter of the inner person. Redemption radically changes the inner person. Redemption begins as radical change in the spiritual heart. Those changes affect the whole person, causing effects that can be externally observed. But only God can “see” the inner change itself.

**New Attitudes, Speech, and Actions:** Redemption leads to changes in attitude, speech, and action, all externally observable. Impartiality means no one’s worth should be determined by degree of wealth or poverty, level of power, or quality of their clothes. Such things are inappropriate markers for determining the worth of anyone, unbelievers or believers. God made people in His image and all have value for that reason.

Sometimes the presence of God’s image is difficult to perceive. But God sees. He can change a person’s life in an instant. He is in the business of creating new life, even in established sinners, whose earthly value to anyone appears to be zero.

Jesus says His followers will be known by their love for God and love for one another. Their love controls what they say, what they do, and where they devote time, finances, and other resources. A worldly person devoted to the pleasures of this world will be known by their version of these same factors.

**Knowing a Person's Moral Nature:** Character and godliness are aspects of life which determine the moral nature of a person's life. Can character and godliness be perceived by someone else? Not directly. The essence of character and godliness is in the innermost person and, hence, invisible to outside observers. Only God sees into the heart knowing people as they truly are. The best we can do is to observe any external signs of the presence or absence of good moral character and godliness. Jesus tells us to do exactly that.

Words, emotions, and actions flow from the heart and witnesses to a person's inner being. If these observables don't match up to a person's profession of faith we, and that person, should question the authenticity of their declared faith in order to minister to their true need. A true believer and one who is deceived as to their faith have different spiritual needs and need to be ministered to in different ways. New believers have different spiritual needs from mature believers. Each is to be ministered to appropriately.

**No Bias for or Against Wealth or Poverty:** James is neither for or against wealth or poverty, nor high society or social outcasts. That is simply not the issue. His view is the one found throughout Scripture. Leviticus 19:15 says, ***"You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor."*** Character and godliness matter! God is no respecter of outward appearance, social position, mental, or physical abilities. He judges the inner person.

James mentions that certain rich people blaspheme the name of Christ (as do certain poor people). That is despicable and sinful. People who do this may or may not claim to be believers. They clearly are not leading godly lives. What they are doing is wrong and they need correction.

**The Law of Love:** In general, Scripture says people are to be dealt with according to the law of love. Believers are to strive to meet a person's true needs, to

recognize a person's value as one created in the image of God. Leviticus 19:33-34 says, "*When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.*"<sup>34</sup> *You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.*"

James highlights this truth by saying that, rather than make improper distinctions between people wealth, status, power and other external factors, believers should operate according to the royal law of love: "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" Between people, love is to be the ruling principle. If we love our neighbor, we will keep all God's laws with respect to him. When a believer mistreats a fellow believer, the effect is to slander the noble name of Christ to whom we belong.

The principles of the moral Law continue to apply to the redeemed but in a different way than they applied to the people of Israel. Israel was to perfectly obey the Law in order to achieve salvation. Believers obey the moral Law in respect and honor for the One who gave them salvation. The moral Law is for our benefit, not as a way to salvation, but as a way to live a life that pleases God.

Believers are not subject to the Law as a means to salvation. The Law reflects God's nature. By obeying the moral Law, believers lives reflect His holiness. The Law provides a mirror which reveals a person's transgressions, showing and teaching what is right and wrong. It is not a ladder by which the unsaved can climb into salvation. Being born again does not free a person from obligation to obey God. That incredible gift of grace increases obligation. Being in Christ establishes love for Him as the new basis for obedience to the moral Law. Christ liberates believers from the penalty of sin and gives them the power to obey His will.

**Be Merciful:** A person who shows no mercy cannot expect to receive mercy at the judgment (see also Matthew 5:7, Micah 6:8). Showing mercy is both evidence of faith and a right response to the mercy we have received from God. If we are truly in Christ, we will develop a merciful attitude and be merciful in action. Being in Christ is a foundation for confidence that we will be vindicated at the judgment because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us. We are dependent on Christ's righteousness, not our own. Merciful acts are **EVIDENCE** of the fact that we are in Christ.

**Summary of 2:1-13:** The way we deal with believers (and other people in general) is to be impartial in the sense that God is impartial. We should have the same rules and expectations of moral behavior for everyone. We should strive to impartially meet the true needs of each person (believer or non-believer) as measured against the Word of God. Some will need physical help, some will need to hear the gospel, some will need a friend to come alongside, some will need to be put into prison for breaking the law, some will need to be restrained from vindictive actions against others.

***James 2:14-26:*** “*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?<sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,<sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?<sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.<sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe- and shudder!*

**Faith:** Saving faith is the gracious gift of God enabling us to respond to the gospel. We receive saving faith in a once for all time miraculous event that occurs at a single point of time. Saving faith is all of God. We are passive receivers of saving faith. Nothing we do or could do influences in any way God’s gift of saving faith. We are regenerated, receiving from God a new nature, are justified before Him, and the Holy Spirit dwells within us. What then is sustaining faith?

Those whom God regenerates, He gives the gift of saving faith and justifies. Justification means God in His pardoning grace declares each regenerated believer to be righteous in His sight based on the salvation work of Christ.

Justification establishes a believer’s destiny. Paul, in Romans 8:30, says “***And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.***” What God begins, He completes. Those “justified” will be sanctified by the Holy Spirit through transformation into a likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ. But it doesn’t end there. Those

justified and sanctified will be glorified, that is made sinless and holy to spend eternity in the presence of God.

In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul tells believers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is working in them to will and to act according to His good purpose. God does what we can't do and "works in" salvation into the inner being. The redeemed, with the aid of the indwelling Holy Spirit, then participate in "working out" that salvation in their life.

"Working out" the salvation God has "worked in" requires a continuing right relationship with the Holy Spirit. That relationship can change. Paul says believers can grieve or quench the Holy Spirit, or walk in step with Him. As the Holy Spirit works, transforming us from within, it is our obligation to cooperate by corresponding thoughts and actions, to "walk in step" with Him. When we don't cooperate grieving or quenching Him are possible. God gives a special gift that enables believers to work out the implications of the saving faith He worked in us.

**Sustaining Faith**: The special gift is God's gift of sustaining faith. Saving faith is a one-time gift from God in which we are totally passive. Sustaining faith is God's gift to the redeemed to keep them moving toward glorification. Believers participate in sustaining faith by their obedience and cooperation with the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Sustaining faith is **EVIDENCED** or **VALIDATED** externally for others to see by the good works of a changed life. If there are no good works, likely there is no sustaining faith. If there is no sustaining faith, there was no saving faith. Claiming faith when all external evidence is to the contrary is an indication of no faith or, as James says, dead faith.

Earlier, we discussed intellectual and other forms of faith in which the whole person is not involved. The major categories of the inner person are intellect, emotions, imagination, and will. True faith always involves all elements. False faith may take the form of "intellectual faith," "emotional faith," "willful faith," or combinations of any two or three of the major divisions of the inner person.

Unless the will is engaged, faith at most involves mere thoughts, emotions, and words but no action, no good works. That is what James means when he says faith without works is dead faith.

**Faith Without Good Works:** James says, *“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?”* These two rhetorical questions reflect James’ chief concern. The remainder of the passage he fleshes out what he means when he says that a faith claim without good works is not likely to be genuine faith. The lack of good works should be enough to cause a person to question the genuineness of their faith and fervently seek the real thing.

God knows whether or not we have saving faith. Scripture says we too can know for certainty whether or not we have saving faith. But can we know if the claim of faith by someone else is true? We cannot see into their heart, only God can do that. We have only limited observations of their outward behavior. But James says unless a person who claims to have faith shows outward behavioral evidence of an inward new spirit, then we and they have no reason to believe the claim. Such a person should carefully examine themselves to see if they truly do have saving faith.

James provides four examples of genuine faith’s characteristics. The first is genuine faith is not indifferent, but involved (2:15-16). He illustrates this with an example of bad behavior. James says, *“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,<sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?<sup>17</sup> So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”* No doubt, many of us have witnessed that kind of response to need.

The second example is in 2:17 *“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”* In this verse James says that genuine faith is never independent. It is always accompanied by good works. Faith and good works are a coupled together in a binding relationship. If there are no good works, then that faith is “dead.” By dead, James means the claimed faith is useless, ineffective, and impotent.

The third example is that genuine faith is not hidden but visible to others. James says in 2:18, *“But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”* This argument appears to be from someone who agrees with James but perhaps claims to have a quiet, private faith. No doubt, you know someone like that. Someone who says I don’t impose my faith on others. I keep it to myself. That is not the way of genuine faith. Genuine faith reaches out to others and can be seen by everyone.



The fourth quality of genuine faith is it is not controlled by the intellect alone, but by the innermost person of the heart. In 2:19, James says, ***“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder!”*** Believing that God exists to be factually true is never enough. Believing God exists, without committing to obedient trust in Him, in any thoughtful person should indeed lead to fear.

***James 2:17-26: “Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?<sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?<sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;<sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”- and he was called a friend of God.<sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.<sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?<sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”***

James cites two examples of genuine faith from the past. The first is fruitfulness of faith toward God. James says, ***“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?<sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? The lesson is:<sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;<sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”- and he was called a friend of God.<sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*** The second is fruitfulness of faith toward people. In 2:25 James says, ***“And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”***

James sums up his argument with this conclusion in 2:26. ***“For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”*** Faith must involve the intellect, emotions, and the will. Faith without willingly doing good works is not genuine faith.

**What is Next?** Truth in communication.