



Valid Faith: Impartiality and Works James 2

Introduction

It is in the second chapter that James seems to contradict Paul the most. This upsets many people who do not realize that the same subject may be handled from different perspectives and for different reasons. James presents faith as an activity: its validity, vitality, and expression. Paul presents faith as a gift of grace, its availability and undeservedness.

James presents the liberty of living by faith, a higher standard than living by the law. Christianity broke its Jewish mold in 70 A.D. with the destruction of the Temple by the Romans. The consequent dissolution of the priesthood and loss of the land created a homeless condition for the Jewish people which lasted until 1948. According to Hurlburt in The Story of the Christian Church, this destruction put an end to all relation between Judaism and Christianity. Up to this time, the church had been regarded by the Roman government and by the people at large as a branch of the Jewish religion; since then, Judaism and Christianity have been separate.

James and Paul knew that Jesus likened the gospel to new wine. Its potency would break the old wineskin container of Judaism. Neither will Christianity today be contained within cultural "wineskins." It is always breaking the mold because Christ is cross-cultural. Christians of all national and ethnic backgrounds exhibit similar godly qualities and fruits of the Spirit.

On the other hand, our Christian faith has mideastern roots and is built upon the foundation of Jewish prophets and Jewish apostles (Ephesians 2:20).

As a scrupulous, orthodox Jew, raised in a home where the Mosaic law prescribed every human activity, and where the word of God was the authority and absolute standard of behavior, James cared about the effects of a cataclysmic shift from Law to Grace.

Too much freedom too soon, without adequate instruction and preparation, can have disastrous consequences, as parents know. James and Paul, like two sides of a coin, represent opposite sides of a truth. We who are believers are not lawless and unrestrained in our behavior, but controlled by the Holy Spirit who writes God's Law upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 11:19, 2 Corinthians 3:3).

Outline of James 2

- I. Valid Faith's Impartiality- James 2:1-13
- II. Valid Faith's Good Works- James 2:14-26

I. Valid Faith's Impartiality- James 2:1-13

- A. Impartiality, a Christlike Virtue - James 2:1

1. *Our Lord Jesus Christ*

In everything, the Lord Jesus Christ is our starting point. He is our example of what humanity was created to be and our model of how to live. James uses His full title, *our Lord Jesus Christ*.

a. *Lord*

James unfailingly calls Him *Lord*. He does not presume to use his family connection, but instead positions himself alongside all needy sinners saved by God's grace. James is the example of one who might have claimed special privilege but rather identifies as a servant and worshipper of Jesus. Do you replace worship with an irreverent intimacy toward Jesus Christ, Who is Deity, infinite, Lord of heaven, Creator of the Universe? Or do you honor Him as *Lord*?

b. *Jesus*

Lord is His title, *Jesus* is His human name. It is "Joshua," meaning "God rescues," in Hebrew because He would save, or deliver, His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

c. *Christ*

Christ is another title. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah, Anointed, or the Anointed One, who was chosen by God for a special work, and Whose coming was prophesied throughout the Old Testament. Jesus the Nazarene is Jesus the Christ, or Jesus Christ. The full title, *our Lord Jesus Christ*, combines His Deity with His Humanity and is a mystery called the hypostatic union.

2. *The Lord of glory*

The employment of this term is difficult to explain. It seems to be affixed to Christ as Lord, *The Lord*, *the*

glory (KJV). Yet it is more than an adjective describing Him; it is as if *the glory* is part of Him.

James thought of Him with wonder, no longer the carpenter of their Galilean home, wandering as a rabbi and leader of thousands, but infinitely higher, robed in the Shekinah glory which once was seen by Moses in the burning bush and by Isaiah in the Temple.

B. A Vivid Humorous Illustration - James 2:2-4

1. Partiality portrayed - 2:2-3

Two people attend your meeting, one is dressed expensively. James calls him *a man with gold rings*. The second, in filthy clothing, is obviously poor. How you greet them and treat them is a test of the validity of your faith. Will one receive VIP treatment and the other rejection? The normal thing is to favor the rich and demote the poor (Sit on the floor!). This is to act in our fallen human nature.

2. Partiality identified - 2:4

a. Judging

Have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges....? Jesus said, *Judge not that you be not judged*, because the same yardstick we use will be used against us (Matthew 7:1-2). Partiality is judging a person by externals, by what he has, or how he looks, rather than because of what he is, a fellow human being and a unique creation of God. Everyone has shown favoritism, so James tackles a major human failing to illustrate one of faith's major works.

b. Evil thoughts

Judging begins with *evil thoughts*, James says. Judging is risky business because it assumes one knows all the facts, which is rarely the case.

Treatment of others renders a judgment upon their worth and acceptability. To give the wealthy the best seat, and relegate the poor to a space on the floor, is wicked. It sees only the outside, whereas God sees the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). A person can change clothes, but not one's basic personality.

C. Partiality's Pitfalls - James 2:5-7

1. Judging people chosen by God

God has chosen poor, abused people to be rich in faith. Jesus commended a poor, penniless widow but rebuked the proud, powerful Pharisees. She was rich in faith while they did not know they were poor, wretched and blind (Mark.12:42; Revelation 3:17).

Which of these best reflects your attitude and the state of your faith?

People who are poor in this life may be the royalty of heaven. Jesus gave an account of a rich man and a poor beggar to teach this (Luke 16:19-31). Would you befriend those who are poor here and rich forever, as well as those who are rich here but may be poor forever?

Jesus found His greatest support and response among the common people who heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). Paul said, *For you see your calling brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called* (1 Corinthians 1:26) With which do you identify most?

2. Oppressed and Sued by the Rich - 2:6-7

a. Oppressors

The rich can be oppressors. Favorable treatment based on wealth, appearance or position runs the risk of favoring the ungodly and cruel, not to mention that it is wasted on them for they can buy favors.

b. Blasphemers

Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? The rich and powerful often feel free to misuse and ridicule the Name we love.

D. How to Overcome Partiality - James 2:8-13

1. Fulfill the royal law of love - 2:8

The essence of the gospel is love. Partiality is lack of love. The Law said, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Leviticus 19:18). James says if you do this *you do well*. Will you love rather than judge people?

2. Confess partiality as sin - 2:9-11

Treating people differently may seem minor, but James says that when you show partiality you commit sin for the law convicts you as *transgressors*, needing forgiveness.

Do you favor one child over another, one employee over another, one customer over another? This misrepresents Christ's love to the world. Unequal treatment causes resentments which flare into open conflict. James makes it equal to adultery or murder.

Partiality, or favoritism, shows lack of love for both parties, the one favored and the one neglected. James bluntly calls it sin, because it breaks God's law. John puts it this way, *He who does not love his brother whom*

he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (1 John 4:20) It is hypocritical to say you love God, and yet refuse to love people whom He created.

Partiality is one of the most subtle, pervasive, ubiquitous sins known on earth, yet this writer does not remember ever hearing favoritism preached on as sin. *If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins* (i.e., partiality) *and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

3. Realize one sin breaks all - 2:10-11

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. One spot makes an otherwise clean cloth dirty. When by one sin, anger, Moses broke the tablets of the Ten Commandments, he broke all of them.

One sin breaks God's whole law as much as one microbe spoils perfect health. One glass of salmonella can pollute a city's entire water system and one spot may indicate the presence of a fatal disease. One small stain renders a dress or shirt unclean. One flaw in a jet engine can cause a huge plane to crash, killing hundreds of people.

4. Be accountable to the law of liberty - 2:12

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. Peter learned not to despise what God had chosen after receiving a vivid illustration (Acts 10:15). For Peter to bear the Good News of God's love in Christ, he could not think of some people as more worthy than others. Favoritism is incompatible with Christian witness. Christ died for all because all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Sin is the great equalizer since we are all tainted with it as with a fatal disease. The test of being able to take God's message to anyone was flunked by Jonah in the Old Testament but passed by Peter and Paul in the New Testament. However, it required Christ's death and resurrection. We love because He first loved us.

Humanism has looted the Judeo-Christian ethic and claimed title to the idea of loving others. But no one can truly love others unless they first love God. Human love is self-centered and limited. God's love is sacrificial and limitless. Those who love God and others reap love's reward.

5. Respect the Law of the Boomerang - 2:13

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. We will be judged by the "Law of the Boomerang." What we get will equal what we have given (Matthew 7:1,2; Obadiah 15). This is an inexorable law of a moral universe. The physical curvature of

the universe discovered by Einstein has a spiritual parallel: what goes out from us eventually comes back to us. If we give love and kindness, courtesy and consideration, that is what we receive. If we give harsh judgments, criticism, bitterness and selfishness, that too is what we receive also. The Creator decreed it to work that way.

What we give is often what we have received from others. However, Christ can break the bondage of that spiral. When we recognize and confess attitudes in ourselves and as we study God's word in reliance on the Holy Spirit, He cleanses us from them.

II. Valid Faith's Good Works - James 2:14-26

A. Faith Evidenced by Works - James 2:14-20

1. "Vain faith" versus "saving faith" - 2:14

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? There is an appearance of faith that is associated with those who glibly say, "O yes, I am a Christian," but are rarely seen at church, take no responsibility in their church and have helped no one move closer to God and eternal life. This is vain and empty faith. It says that "St. Peter will let me in" or "I am as good as the next." It has no life and gives none.

Saving faith, on the other hand, produces fruit, such as impartiality. Faith is the root and works are the fruit. Far from denying that faith alone saves, James differentiates between non-faith, faith that is dead, vain faith, and living/saving faith.

2. Vital signs

As breath, heartbeat and brain-waves give evidence of life, so works give evidence of faith. Paul speaks of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19). Peter tells us to add virtue to our faith (2 Peter 1:3).

Faith in Jesus Christ produces fruit (John 15:1-5). If faith does not produce character, what good is it? It is salt that has lost its savor, good for nothing but trampling underfoot (Matthew 5:13). Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.

Do you have saving faith or empty faith? Is your faith placed in Christ and are you relying on Him for entrance into heaven some day? All other faith is dead, vain and unproductive. Secondly, what do you have to show for your faith? Only faith placed in the Lord Jesus Christ can produce works which God calls good. (Titus 3:5-7, Ephesians 2:8,9).

James wants his readers to know that faith without

works no more qualifies a person for heaven than do works without faith. Talk is cheap. Faith that consists only of words is empty, vain. It is said that if you talk the talk, you must walk the walk. Does your faith have feet?

3. Another vivid illustration - 2:15-16

If a brother or sister is naked or destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart and be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things that are needed for the body, what does it profit? Pious phrases do not fill empty stomachs or clothe bare backs. An unclothed person cannot wear words. A hungry person cannot eat words (although we sometimes have to eat ours!). Just as the existence of the universe proves a Creator, so works that can be "worn and eaten" will result from true faith (Hebrews 11:3). Valid belief produces virile acts.

4. Dead faith - 2:17-20

James says it yet another way, that *faith without works is dead* (2:14,17,20). He challenges anyone to compare the results of their faith without works with the results of the works of his faith. Faith in the head is dead, nothing more than humanistic philosophy. Mental assent to the facts concerning Jesus - His life, birth, death, resurrection, and His coming again - are not sufficient. No eternal fruit is produced by a belief which never leads to active obedience to God. Where true faith is present, sins are forsaken and people are helped.

James continues, *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble.* James believed in the unseen world. The Bible recognizes its existence. It tells us of Satan, his expulsion from heaven, and the kingdom of darkness. So we are not uninformed. Jesus rebuked demons who, incidentally, recognized Him. Mere recognition of who Jesus is does not make one a Christian. Demons are fallen angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God (Jude 4; 2 Peter 2:6; 2 Corinthians 11:14; Ephesians 2:2 and Matthew 25:41). They know about God, and even about Jesus (Matthew 8:29). But knowledge itself cannot save anyone. Saving faith must be in the Person of Jesus Christ beyond the facts.

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? James challenges us across the centuries to examine our intent! Shallow people seldom wrestle with eternal issues which will affect their eternal destinies. Few people investigate their own doctrine or think deeper than the newspaper, latest sports event, or television program. Do you care as much about the kind of faith it takes to get to heaven as you do about the "news"?

How many people have lived and died with never a thought to their eternal destiny, their immortal soul, a real heaven and a real hell, a personal, loving God and a hate-filled devil? James is an evangelist, pleading for our souls, "O vain individual, (hey, you out there), wake up, think, live."

Are you living in emptiness, accepting the world and events around you as all there is? Will you accept James' challenge to stretch your mind and think about eternity and Jesus' death and resurrection? Then confess your sin and surrender your life to Him. This is to realize life's purpose and to receive eternal life.

B. Examples of saving faith - James 2:21-26

In Hebrews 11, that great "faith chapter," heroes and heroines of the Old Testament are displayed as models of faith for our edification. James chooses two as examples of genuine faith. Being impartial, he selects a man and woman who were as different as they could be. Abraham immigrated to Palestine, Rahab was born there. Abraham was older. Rahab was presumably young, for she married one of the Hebrews and bore children. Abraham was wealthy and respected. Rahab worked for her living and was a harlot. Neither age, nor social status has any bearing on the quality of one's faith. Whoever and wherever you are, you can have saving faith.

1. Abraham - 2:21-24

a. Progenitor

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? James calls Abraham *our father* as he writes to a predominantly Jewish Church. Actually, Abraham is claimed as father by the world's three great religions - Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

b. Justified

We know that Abraham was not eternally justified by his works alone because the Bible teaches justification by faith alone (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11). Justification means just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned. God's judicial response to our faith wipes clean our slate of sin. James offers Abraham's life of works as evidence of his faith.

James selects Abraham's offering of Isaac, his miracle son, upon the altar (Genesis 22:9). Isaac, the son of promise, was born miraculously when both Abraham and Sarah were past the age for reproduction. Isaac was the promised seed through whom the Redeemer, the ultimate Seed, would come (Galatians 3:15).

God had promised a Redeemer (Genesis 3:15). That covenant was to be fulfilled through Isaac (Genesis 17:21 and 21:12). Yet, God seemed to command Abraham to offer him up as a sacrifice. Knowing that the promised Redeemer was to come through Isaac, Abraham willingly offered him. What a work of faith! To keep His word, God would have to resurrect Isaac! Abraham dared to believe that, with God, all things are possible. He believed in the resurrection, and God gave him the ram in the thicket, the substitutionary sacrifice, in Isaac's place. Abraham became the father of the faithful and of all who believe (Galatians 3). Do you believe in God's power to rescue you from a "hopeless" situation? Will you trust God for supernatural deliverance?

Paul says that Abraham *did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith... being fully convinced that what He had promised He was able also to perform* (Romans 4:24). When God put Abraham's faith to the test, it stood because it was real. He really believed God and God's words.

c. Scripture fulfilled

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God. James believed that God's words must be fulfilled. Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6). But how do we know the reality of those words? Abraham's faith was like money in the bank. His passbook recorded that he had it, but until ink on the page is transformed into cash in the hand, the money, like faith, is theoretical. The test is when the passbook is presented at the bank. What was Abraham's test? It was when he offered up Isaac. His faith had been tested earlier when he left Ur on a 600 mile trek to a new land. It was completed, mature, when he gave God the best he had and left the consequences with God.

His works proved the reality of his faith. Abraham became known as God's Friend. Friends believe each other. This became his reputation (2 Chronicles 20:7). Are you God's friend because you read His Word, the Bible, believe it and obey it?

2. Rahab the (former) harlot - 2:25-26

Both James and Hebrews hold up Rahab as an example of true faith. Matthew's genealogy of Christ includes her with only four other women.

What was the evidence of her faith? She concealed Hebrew spies who scouted out her land for conquest. She had a hard choice to make, to cast her own and her family's lot in with her wicked, doomed countrymen or with God and His people. What if she lost? It was a risk of faith taken step by step.

Rahab received the spies peacefully (Hebrews 11:31). Then she hid them (James 2:25). Then she sent them out another way so that they could escape. When Joshua's army stormed Jericho, she and her family joined them. Rahab probably married one of the spies, or another Israelite man. Thus, the prostitute became a proselyte to Judaism. This mother in Israel became an ancestor of King David and Jesus Christ.

By faith you can also be linked closely with Jesus Christ and all His people. Is the Holy Spirit calling you to a life of faith, as He did Rahab? What choice will you make.

Applications

1. How would you describe your faith? A vain leap in the dark, a hope that all is well? Is it empty intellectual assent, a nod to creed, doctrine or church covenant? Such faith may be slightly comforting but will fail when tested.
2. Is your faith valid, anchored in Christ and who He is, risking all on His promises?
3. Is your faith the kind that chooses Christ above culture as both Abraham and Rahab did? Do you dare to be different, a pioneer in you family, a pilgrim in the world?
4. What is the evidence of your faith? Can you say with James, I will show you my faith by my works?
5. What do your works tell others about God? Are your works evidence that your God is the true God?
6. What works could you do today because you believe in Jesus?

QUESTIONS

Questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all notes with references.

1. List the steps for overcoming partiality or favoritism.
2. Give reasons for treating each individual fairly.
3. State in your own words the relationship of works to faith.
4. ♥(Heart Question) Did James 2 make any change in your life? Could you share it?

DAY TWO: Read James 3:1-5.

5. In verse 1, what inherent pitfall does every teacher face? (See Romans 2:21.)
6. What do you learn from Proverbs 10:19 and Matthew 12:36-37?
7. What two things are true of a person whose words never offend (James. 3:2)?
8. a. What are James' two examples of little things controlling big things?
b. What do you learn from these examples and verse 5?

DAY THREE: Read James 3:6-8 with Proverbs 15.

9. From James 3:6, list five things about the tongue.
10. Using Proverbs 15, what kind of words stimulate
 - a. anger, rage, etc?
 - b. passions, lusts, desires, etc.?
 - c. kindness, generosity, helpfulness?
 - d. praise, gratitude, and thanksgiving to God?
11. Which of the above effects would you like your words to have?

12. What do you learn about Jesus' words in:
 - a. Luke 4:22?

 - b. John 6:63?

 - c. John 6:68?

13. a. How does the nature of the tongue differ from the nature of animals (James 3:7-8)?
 - b. If you have ever tamed a wild animal, tell how you did it?

14. a. To what is the tongue likened in James 3:8b? Give an example
 - b. To what is the tongue likened in Psalm 52:2? Give an example.

DAY FOUR: Read James Chapter 3:9-12 with Psalm 19.

15. a. From James 3:9-12, what does James say ought not to happen?
 - b. Which of the two things mentioned in James 3:10 do people hear most from you?

16. a. How can the prayer of Psalm 19:14 help this condition?
 - b. Will you pray this prayer daily and sincerely until you see improvement?

DAY FIVE: Read James 3:13-14 with Proverbs 12:6-23.

17. a. To an observer, what may be the first evidence of our wisdom or foolishness according to vs. 13?
 - b. Compare "meekness" (KJV) in 3:13 with "meekness" in 1:21. What do you think it means?

18. Proverbs 12:6-23 describes wise and foolish persons. Under the headings below, list the verses and phrases which speak of each:
 - a. fools, wicked, etc.

 - b. wise, just, or prudent

19. a. Where do bitterness, envy, and strife reside? Give verse.
- b. What does James say we should do about this condition (14b)?

DAY SIX: Read James 3:15-18.

20. Define each of these three words using the verses listed with them.
- a. bitterness: Acts 8:23, Ephesians 4:31, Hebrews 12:15, James 3:16
- b. envy: Proverbs 14:30, Matthew 27:18, Acts 7:9, Romans 13:13, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Galatians 5:21, Titus 3:3
- c. strife: Matthew 12:18-19, John 6:52, 2 Timothy 2:24 (Note: some translations may differ, but try to discover the general idea.)
21. Compare the two kinds of wisdom mentioned in James 3:15-18. Give the results of each.
22. What will the person who asks for wisdom receive according to 1:5? According to 3:17?
23. What further enlightenment on wisdom do you find in these verses?
- Job 28:28
- Proverbs 1:7 with Psalms 19:7
- Proverbs 2:10
- Proverbs 11:30
- Daniel 12:3
- Colossians 4:5 with Matthew 10:16
- 1 Corinthians 1:24,30 with Proverbs 8:14