
Valid Faith: Impartiality and Works **James 2**

Introduction

The second chapter of James is the one that confuses many Christians. Some think that what James says in this chapter disagrees with what Paul says in his epistles. Both Paul and James speak about faith, but they are talking about different parts of faith. Paul wants his readers to understand that nothing they do (works) will help them to receive salvation. Only the work Jesus did on the cross followed by His resurrection make salvation possible. While Paul talks about how salvation is received (by grace), James will tell us in this chapter how a person will behave once he receives salvation.

James also explains the freedom we get from “living by faith.” “Living by faith” replaced **Judaism**, which was known as ‘living by the law.’ Jesus compared the gospel (good news about Jesus) to new wine. New wine is so strong that if you put it in an old wineskin (container), the skin bursts open (like a soda can left in the freezer). The gospel caused the law from the Old Testament (Judaism) to burst open. This means that even though believers still need to obey the law of God, we are no longer doomed by it. When we sin (fail to keep the law), we are forgiven because Jesus “burst open” the penalty of the law. The new way of life, called ‘living by faith,’ would replace Judaism and come to be known as Christianity (Acts 11:26). James was very concerned for his fellow Jews. He wanted the change from Judaism to Christianity to go smoothly for them. He knew that change can be difficult.

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

James instructs believers to not *hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with **partiality***. Immediately, he gives an example of how we might be tempted to show partiality. Imagine that you have moved to a new home and some neighbors come to meet your family. One neighbor is dressed expensively (James calls him *a man with gold rings*). The other is in dirty, old clothes, and he may even smell funny. Would you treat one with more kindness than the other? A situation like this can be a test of your faith. Our **sinful nature** can push us to treat one neighbor better than the other. We have to fight against our own wants and do what God wants.

Partiality comes from judging another person. It is a sin to judge others as less important. We are all fellow human beings and unique creations of God. Jesus said, *Judge not, that you be not judged* (Matthew 7:1-2). He also tells us to treat others the way we want to be treated (Matthew 7:12).

People who are lowly (poor) in this life (on earth) may be the royalty (rich) of heaven. Jesus praised a poor, penniless widow but rebuked the proud, powerful **Pharisees**. The widow was rich in faith, while the Pharisees did not know they were poor, wretched, and blind (Mark.12:42; Revelation 3:17). Is your faith more like the penniless widow’s or the proud Pharisees? Jesus found His greatest support among the common (regular) people and they listened to Him gladly (Mark 12:37).

The rich and powerful often feel free to misuse and make fun of the Name we love. James points this out when he asks, *Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you*

are called? **Blasphemy** is tragic. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, blasphemed against the Holy Spirit and they both dropped dead when they did it (Acts 5:5, 10). A man willing to blaspheme God must think he is very important. In fact, he believes that his own human thoughts and ideas are better than God's thoughts. Can you think of ways that God is blasphemed today?

Thankfully, God does not leave us alone to fight our natural desire to be partial. He sent us His son, Jesus, as an example (John 13:15). Jesus did many things that surprised his disciples. Perhaps the most surprising moment was when he filled a bowl with water and began to wash their feet. They had just finished their meal and were surely not expecting such actions from their teacher and Lord! But Jesus said, *I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is He who is sent greater than He who sent Him* (John 13:16). Jesus showed them in person that nothing was below them. That means no one could ask them to do something which would allow them to say, 'I'm too good for that!' Is there anything in your life that you think you are too good to do? Perhaps cleaning toilets, or picking up after a pet? Do you argue with your siblings about doing chores? Are you too good to help your sibling with his chores when he falls behind? We are always looking for ways to exalt ourselves. Be alert and the next time you see dirty, filthy, bare feet, imagine our Savior bent over washing those very feet, as if they were your own feet. Be humbled by His extraordinary love!

Partiality is a lack of love and misrepresents God's love. The law said, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Leviticus 19:18). James says if you do this, *you do well*. Treating people differently may not seem like a big deal, but it IS sin and the law convicts you as *transgressors* (lawbreakers) needing forgiveness. When putting on a white shirt, if you look in the mirror and see one smudge of dirt on it, it is dirty. You may be able to hide that spot from your parent, but God sees all

our sin and it cannot be hidden from Him. One sin breaks God's whole law as much as one germ spoils perfect health. One flaw in a jet engine can cause a huge plane to crash. One sin is enough.

Sin is what makes us all equal to each other and proves that none of us is better than the other. Do you believe you are better than a murderer in jail? Many say to themselves, "At least I am not THAT bad." But any and all sin separates us from God. We cannot be more or less separated from God. You are either separate or not separate. The murderer in jail is separated from God just as much as you are. We all need God's forgiveness.

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

What does it profit, my brethren, (what good is it) if someone says he has faith but does not have works (but does not act like it)? Can faith save him? (Can saying he has faith be enough to save him?) Some people say they are Christians, but do not act like it. God can see into every heart and mind, and He knows when faith is real. Men cannot see into the heart and mind, so we look for other 'signs' to see if someone is a Christian. Do they go to church regularly? Do they serve (help) others in their church? Have they helped others move closer to God and eternal life? These and other acts (works) of faith offer proof to the world. Note: James never says our works make us just before God. Our works are evidence to other people, not to God. He knows our hearts (Jeremiah 17:10). Nothing we do (or don't do) will change Him (Hebrews 13:8).

True faith that saves will produce fruit. What kind of fruit? It's not apples and bananas. Fruit is another way of saying 'works' or 'actions.' Each person is like a tree that produces either good fruit (works of obedience to God's word) or bad fruit (works that please man's sinful nature). One example of a good fruit is being impartial (not showing favoritism).

If each person is like a tree, then the tree's roots represent faith (what the person believes) and the fruits represent works (what the person does). James teaches about different kinds of faith: 1) dead faith, 2) vain faith, 3) believing faith, and 4) saving faith. Let us look at each kind separately.

Dead faith is faith without fruit. It represents a man who claims to believe in Jesus but has no fruit. Faith in Jesus Christ produces fruit (John 15:1-5). If faith does not produce fruit, what good is it? It is like salt that has lost its flavor and isn't useful anymore (Matthew 5:13).

Vain faith is a faith of words. Talk, talk, talk, but nothing ever happens. Faith that consists of words without actions is empty and vain. There is a common expression that says, 'if you talk the talk, you must walk the walk.' Does your faith have feet?

Believing faith is just that. Belief in God, but no desire to obey Him. So many walk the streets saying that they believe in a 'higher power.' (Maybe they use the words 'higher power' because their soul fears their lack of concern.) Those with 'believing faith' do not have works of obedience to God. James' words are chilling: *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble.* 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 Jesus (Matthew 8:29). But knowledge is not enough to save anyone.

Saving faith is believing in Jesus Christ, God the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Saving faith also believes that people have no hope apart from God. That means, you believe you need to be saved. Many people believe in God, but they don't think that there is anything wrong with themselves. They don't believe that they need to be saved. Saving faith is belief in God, knowing you need the Savior,

and turning away from your sin. Turning away from sin leads to obeying God. Obeying God results in actions that glorify God. And, THAT is why James can say with confidence *faith without works is dead* (2:14,17,20). †

Prayer

God, please help me to obey you and produce good fruit. Help me to have a faith that everyone can see, because I obey your words.

Memory Verse

James 2:18, 19 *But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe--and tremble!*

Vocabulary

Judaism - a Jewish religion which follows the Old Testament commandments of God and practices Jewish customs

partiality - showing favor to someone or something instead of another

sinful nature - man's will to break God's law

Pharisees - a religious group of Jews who practiced Judaism and strict observance of the Mosaic law

blasphemy - a behavior or action that is contrary to God and His truth

QUESTIONS FOR JAMES LESSON 3

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Read all notes and references.

1. Give reasons for treating every person fairly.

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2. a. What did you learn from this lesson about faith and works?

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- b. Name one person from the Bible who showed their faith by their works and tell how they did so. You may use an example from the lesson or another you may know from memory.

DAY TWO: Read James 3:1-5a.

3. a. In verse 1, James warns, "Let not many of you become _____."

- b. Why is this warning necessary? Use verse 1.

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- c. Referring to your answer from above, why do you think this is true?

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4. a. In verse 2, what does James mean by "stumble"?

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- b. What does James say about stumbling? Circle the correct answer(s).

Words always cause people to stumble. We all stumble in many ways.

Christians never stumble. If you never speak, you will never stumble.

- c. Fill in the blank: If anyone does not stumble in _____, he is a perfect man? Why?

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5. To what two things does James compare the tongue? Tell how each is like the tongue.
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DAY THREE: Read James 3:5b-12.

6. a. James names more than ten things about the tongue in the above passage. List as many as you can:

b. ♥(Heart Question) Are any of these true of your tongue?

7. What do the following Scripture passages say about the tongue?

Psalm 52:4

Proverbs 6:16-18

Proverbs 17:20

Proverbs 26:28

8. What examples does James give to show that it is a contradiction for a tongue to both bless and curse?

DAY FOUR: Read James 3:13-16.

9. a. How does a person’s life show that he/she is “wise and understanding?”

b. The King James Version and the New King James both use the word “meekness” (*meekness of wisdom*) in verse 13. Your version may use another word which to represent what “meekness” means. If your Bible uses a different word than meekness,” write that word here: _____

What do you think “meekness” means? (You may use a dictionary to help you.)

- 10. a. What do the following passages reveal about meekness?
Matthew 5:5 and Psalm 37:11

Matthew 11:29

2 Corinthians 10:1

James 1:21

1 Peter 3:15

- b. Is meekness a trait you would like to have? Why or why not?

DAY FIVE: Read James 3:14-18.

- 11. Compare and contrast the two wisdoms found in verses 14-17.

Wisdom from above

Wisdom NOT from above

- 12. How do the following Scripture passages help explain verse 18?
Proverbs 11:18

Isaiah 32:17

Romans 14:19

- 13. What did you learn from James 3 that you could apply to your life? How will you do so?

VOCABULARY FOR JAMES LESSON 3

*"The more words you know, the more clearly and powerfully you will think...
and the more ideas you will invite into your mind."*

— Wilfred Funk

DAY ONE: Write the definition of each vocabulary word.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

DAY TWO: Write three sentences using three different vocabulary words from this lesson.

1.

2.

3.

DAY THREE: Circle the word's synonym(s). (Synonym is a word/phrase that means the same thing.)

1. . **partiality** favor dislike neutrality

2. . **blasphemy** insult sin violation

DAY FOUR: Match the word to its meaning.**Word****Definition****Judaism**

a religious group of Jews that practiced Judaism and strict observance of the Mosaic law

partiality

man's will to break God's law

sinful nature

a behavior or action that is contrary to God and His truth

Pharisees

showing favor to someone or something instead of another

blasphemy

a Jewish religion which follows the Old Testament commandments of God and practices Jewish customs

DAY FIVE: Review previous vocabulary words. Try to work from memory.

Fill in the Blank: Review previous vocabulary word(s). Fill in the blanks with the correct word from the Word Bank.

1. _____ - a Jew who faithfully follows the _____ of traditional

2. _____ - decree, destine; God's _____, unalterable ways
3. _____ - brief popular sayings which express _____ thoughts
4. _____ - violent anger; _____ for sin or a crime
5. _____ - moral _____; group of qualities that make a person,
group, or thing _____ from others

Word Bank

Judaism

predetermined

excellence

proverb

practices

punishment

character

Orthodox Jew

ordain

wrath

different

wise

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary DAY FIVE

1. **Orthodox Jew** - a Jew who faithfully follows the practices of traditional Judaism
2. **ordain** - decree, destine; God's predetermined, unalterable ways
3. **proverbs** - brief popular sayings which express wise thoughts
4. **wrath** - violent anger; punishment for sin or a crime
5. **character** - moral excellence; group of qualities that make a person, group, or thing different from others