

James 2:1-13 – Genuine Faith Among God’s People

Read James 2:1-13

Vs 1-4 What does showing favoritism (treating people who look all together better than people who are unkept) have to do with faith? When you treat a wealthy looking person better than a poor looking person you are actually judging them. Showing partiality (discriminating), rather than looking at everyone by faith, is evil. The Lord of glory Himself shows no partiality (Deuteronomy 10:17 and Acts 10:34) so neither should those who put their trust in Him. Partiality was a real issue during James’ day. It was filled with prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality, and religious background. In the ancient world people were routinely and permanently categorized because they were Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian, or whatever. Faith, believing salvation is by grace through faith alone, will understand and treat everyone without partiality. A significant aspect of the work of Jesus was to break down these walls that divided humanity, and to bring forth one new race of mankind in Him (Ephesians 2:14-15)

To show partiality shows that we care more for the outward appearance than we do upon the heart. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). God looks at the heart, and so should we.

To show partiality shows that we misunderstand who is important and blessed in the sight of God. When we assume that the rich man is more important to God or more blessed by God, we put too much value in material riches.

To show partiality shows a selfish streak in us. Usually we favor the rich man over the poor man because we believe we can get more from the rich man. He can do favors for us that the poor man can’t.

Vs 5 What is this verse talking about? Who are the “poor” in this context? This verse is talking about the mercy God showed sinners by sending Christ to die for us (Rom 5:8). The “poor” are those without saving grace. Matt 11:5, 1 Cor 1:26 How are the saved made rich? In faith! What is their “riches”? Heirs of the Kingdom of God. What is the assumed emotion these now rich have? They love God! Notice this inheritance is a PROMISE!!!

Vs 6 – 7 How did they dishonor the poor man? By judging him not worthy to come up to the “good place”. What do the rich tend to do, according to these verses? Oppress the common man and drag them into court. This is often because the love of money is the root of every kind of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). They also blaspheme (speak bad of) the name of Jesus.

Vs 8 – 9 What does James call the royal law according to Scripture? Loving your neighbor as yourself. Lev 19:18, Matt 22:36-40 James is reminding us that the poor man is just as much our neighbor as the rich man is. If, then, the rich and poor are equally our neighbor and we should love them, what does showing partiality become? A sin! Remember sin is missing the mark or violation of the law.

Vs 10 - 11 What is this verse saying? You can’t brag about the laws you keep because by breaking one, you have violated the whole law. See Matt 19:16-23 James here guards us against a selective obedience, the sort that will pick and choose which commands of God should be obeyed and which can be safely disregarded. Don’t we do this today when we turn a blind eye on things like gossip, gluttony, etc. (“acceptable sins”) yet judge sexual immorality and murder as “big sins”?

Vs 12 What is the law of liberty? To understand this, we must first realize the Jewish law was one of compulsion. Jews were compelled to follow the law or face punishment (often stoning to death). Those who have been saved by grace through faith are under the royal law and are FREE to follow love. We know we will not be punished by God for failing to keep the law because Jesus kept it for us and bore the wages of sin (death). We are to speak and do as we are FREE to, by love. Love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

Vs 13 Why are we to speak and do freely in love? Because when you judge, you will be judged. Matt 7:2 You will reap what you sow. Gal 6:7 We should always show mercy to others by refraining from partiality. The mercy we show will be extended to us again on the day of judgment, and that mercy triumphs over judgment. Mercy is not getting what you deserve.

James 2:14 - 26 – Faith Without Works is Dead

Read James 2:14 - 26

Vs 14 What do you understand this verse to mean and does it contradict other Scriptures? On the surface, it does seem to contradict Scripture that say “faith alone” saves you (Eph 2:8–9). James here is giving us a hidden definition of faith. Earlier in this chapter James declared those who are unmerciful to men shall find God severe to themselves, and have judgment without mercy. Hidden within the concept of faith is that it involves practicing holiness and righteousness. In other words, when you get saved by faith, you become a new creation that will express these characteristics (2 Cor 5:17). If you say you are saved by faith but do not show a change, were you really saved?

Vs 15 – 16 What are these verses saying? What you SAY does not prove your salvation faith. The word translated profit means *benefit or advantage*. How does your faith benefit someone if all you do is talk with no corresponding action?

Vs 17 This verse sums this thought up nicely. Faith that doesn’t produce faith-based action is dead, or inactive, faith. Useless. The word for dead means *corpse, lifeless*.

- It is faith that looks not to self, but to Jesus Christ.
- It is faith that agrees with God’s word, both inwardly and with words.
- It is faith that in itself is not a work that deserves reward from God; in this sense it is simply refusing to think God is a liar, and that in itself is not a good work, simply the absence of a sinful work.
- It is faith grounded in what Jesus did on the cross and by the empty tomb.
- It is faith that will naturally be expressed in repentance and good works.
- It is faith that may sometimes doubt; yet the doubts are not bigger than the faith nor are they more permanent than the faith. This faith can say, “Lord I believe; help my unbelief.”
- It is faith that wants others to come to the same faith.
- It is faith that says more than “Lord, Lord” as in Matthew 7:21-23.
- It is faith that not only hears the word of God but does it, as in Matthew 7:24-27.

Vs 18 This verse is showing two different items; faith vs works. It is inferring there is an argument that it’s an “either or” situation. Is this true? No! James is saying I can show you I have faith by my works. He is also saying if you don’t have works, you can’t prove you have faith. Remember the audience of this Book. James wrote to Christians from a Jewish background that discovered the glory of salvation by faith. They knew the exhilaration of freedom from works-righteousness (they came out of a law/works background). But they then went to the other extreme of thinking that works didn’t matter at all.

Vs 19 - 20 What amazing truths are revealed here? Believing in The One True God is good. Demons believe in The One True God. Demons are afraid of Him. People who do not believe works are needed to express true faith are fools.

Vs 21 What can we say about Abraham? Abraham was justified by faith long before he offered Isaac (Gen 15:6). But his obedience in offering Isaac demonstrated that he really did trust God. James properly implies that Abraham actually did offer Isaac his son on the altar, even though the angel stopped him from killing his son. Abraham was so complete in his obedience that he counted Isaac as dead and set him on the altar. Heb 11:19

Vs 22 What was the result of Abraham’s faith works? Faith and works cooperated perfectly together in Abraham. If he never had believed God, he could have never done the good work of obedience when asked to offer Isaac. As well, his faith was proven true – was completed, was made perfect – by his obedient works.

Vs 23 What Scripture was fulfilled? Gen 15:6 What was the result of Abraham’s faithfulness? He was called a friend of God. Since God is the same yesterday, today and forever, when you have a faith-walk that produces faith works, you are a friend of God!

Vs 24 What is the conclusion restated here? You can only be justified (a judicial term that means right with God) by works done as a result of your faith.

Vs 25 What other example does James give? Rahab, a Gentile! Such an interesting choice for James to use. Rahab demonstrated her trust in the God of Israel by hiding the spies and seeking salvation from their God (Josh 2:8-13). Her faith was shown to be living faith because it did something. The lesson from Abraham is clear: if we believe in God, we will do what He tells us to do. The lesson from Rahab is also clear: if we believe in God, we will help His people, even when it costs us something.

Vs 26 What happens to a person’s body when the soul leaves it? The body is dead. It does nothing. That is what faith is without corresponding action.