

James Lesson 02

James Chapter 2

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Memory verses for this week: *James 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:*

Introduction: In the end of chapter 1, we discussed how that personal wrath rarely honors God, but a life lived by obedience and humility brings honor to the Lord Jesus Christ. We also discussed the importance of being more than hearers of the word, but being doers. Unless we apply the Word of God to our lives, our religion is vain and we simply deceive ourselves. This week we begin by studying how to treat both poor and rich men.

I. Our Attitude toward the Rich and Poor

James 2:1 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

We found the definition of faith in our study of Hebrews, and today we are taught that we are to have true faith by treating all men equally. If we show partiality to one group and despise another, we are not pleasing to the Lord. I'm certainly not saying that we should not have discretion against those who sin against God, but we are to still show respect and love to those who have not yet found Christ as Lord and Savior. Except for the grace of God, the roles might be reversed, and they might be saved and needing to reach us for Christ.

Heb 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Phil 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Phil 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Phil 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and disputings:

Phil 2:15 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

Phil 2:16 Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

The inspired writer confronts a problem in some churches. He deals with giving preference to one based upon his class status rather than his character. The word translated as respect of persons (proswpolhqia pro-sopolepsia) refers to 'crass partiality.' James scolds his brethren for having such a discriminatory attitude. They held to the faith of Christ yet were discriminatory in the church. We should treat all people equally, no matter their status in life or their race.

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;

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:

James 2:4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

Both poverty and riches can be a curse. The writer in the Book of Proverbs says, "... give me neither poverty nor riches ..." (Prov. 30:8). It seems that the two most difficult categories of people to reach are those who are the most poverty-stricken and those who are the richest. I truly have had more success with the poor than the rich, but whatever a person's condition, they must know they are in need of a Savior. The rich many times feel self sufficient, when in reality without God, we are spiritual paupers.

We know that Jesus was a friend to all men. He came unto the poor, the broken, those who were religious leaders, and also the rich. Zacchaeus was a small man in stature, but he was a tax collector and appeared to have a substantial amount of worldly riches. We know Jesus dealt with the rich young ruler who loved his money more than Christ. Verse 2 warns that if someone comes in and has a gold ring and pretty clothes, we are not to treat the rich man better than the poor. Many churches have little cliques, and if you don't meet the criteria, you are not part of the group. God is against this, and says that if we are partial, we have evil thoughts.

God loves all men, all women, all boys and all girls. We may not understand the person who comes in our doors, and they may be very offensive to us in their looks. But we should do everything in our power to make that person feel comfortable and try to reach them with the saving message of Jesus Christ. When Jesus changes the heart, the appearance takes care of itself. Paul was a man who tried to come unto all men at their level and to find common ground on which to build. People have to know we love them before we can really be effective in telling about God's love for the sinner, and what it takes to be born again.

1 Cor 9:19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

1 Cor 9:20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

1 Cor 9:21 To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

1 Cor 9:22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

James poses a situation wherein two people come to a service. One is obviously affluent with his visible jewelry and expensive clothing. The other is obviously poor in his old dirty clothes. The contrasting response to the two visitors is apparent.

James poses how they in fact offered to the affluent guest the best seating in the house. The reference to the poor fellow being seated under the footstool is a metaphor which in modern manner of speaking would be the back row. In other words, it was the least desirable place.

James concludes, "Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?" His reference to "judges of evil thoughts" has the idea of 'judges with evil intentions.' The greater point is that they in an evil and unjust way were sitting in judgment over others.

The only criteria of their judgment was the apparent disparity in wealth and class between the two. James may have used a hypothetical situation or made an observation of an actual event. Either way, his point remains. There ought not be class distinctions in the church. Paul made clear that in Christ and therefore in the church there was neither bond nor free.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Col 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

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?

James 2:6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

James 2:7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

In verse 5, we see that the poor have been chosen by God to be rich in faith and to become heirs of the kingdom. Are they righteous because they are poor?

No... just as man's money does not automatically make us evil. But the poor have little of this world's goods, and they can see that they need help. And there is only one who can give the drink of living water that satisfies the soul forever. All must come through Jesus to come unto God. James reminds them that the rich were the ones who had oppressed these early Christians. The rich are quick many times to condemn the Lord and blaspheme, and this is not pleasing in God's sight. We are not to take the Lord's name in vain.

Rev 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

Rev 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Remember that it says that the first test of our faith is that we are not to show respect to persons. So we sure need to be careful to treat everyone fairly.

In verse 5, James offers a simple truth illustrated through out the scriptures.

"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 fact of the matter is, God has obviously chosen the poor of the world to be rich in faith. Abraham Lincoln once said, 'God must have loved the poor, because He made so many of them.' Jesus taught that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Rich people do get saved. But the vast preponderance of God's people are those of modest means. That is not by accident. Those in low estate learn to trust God and live by faith to a far greater degree than the affluent.

There a crown of life is promised for those who so love Him. The context there is of persevering in the face of trouble in the Christian life. It parallels Revelation 2:10 of being faithful until death. Such faithful perseverance will lead to a rich inheritance and reward in glory some day.

In verse 6, James confronts his readers with their spiritual bigotry. "But ye have despised the poor." The word translated despised (atimazw atimazo) has the sense of 'treating dishonorably' or with contempt. Such was evil as he had noted in verse 4. He then reminded them, "Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?"

The wealthy of that day were harsh in their treatment of men of lesser means. Moreover, they were not shy about suing another for any money due them. In addition, James asked, "Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?" He asked, were not these same affluent people they were trying to impress in their services in fact blasphemers? Many of that same bunch were known to blaspheme the name of Christ. Though unstated, James leaves the implication, why are you courting that crowd?

II. The Royal Law

James 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

James 2:9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

If we want to demonstrate true faith, we need to fulfil the royal law which means to treat others the way we want to be treated. When Jesus was asked what the great commandment of the law was, He told them to put God first, and then to treat your neighbor as you would want to be treated.

Mat 22:36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Mat 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

Mat 22:38 This is the first and great commandment.

Mat 22:39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Mat 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

When Jesus says that on these 2 commandments hang all the law and prophets, we should pay attention. Notice that if you do those two, you won't break any of the ten commandments. If my memory does not fail me, the first 4 commandments speak of our relationship from man to God, whereas the last six speak of how we should treat one another, man to man. We need to do these two, and we will be pleasing to God in a great way. Notice how valuable Paul said charity was in I Corinthians 13. Charity and love mean the same thing.

1 Cor 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

1 Cor 13:2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

1 Cor 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

*1 Cor 13:4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
1 Cor 13:5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
1 Cor 13:6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
1 Cor 13:7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
1 Cor 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*

James' advice is simple. "If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well." The reference to the royal law of the Scripture likely has the sense of 'the king of laws' for Jesus had said that on the law of love hangs all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:40). Truly the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," is one of the greatest commandments.

If the churches today would so fulfil that simple yet profound principle, we would indeed do well. The application clearly was toward the discriminatory attitude prevalent in the churches to which James wrote. That discrimination for the rich over the poor manifested a lack of love on their part for their less affluent brethren.

In verse 9, James continues. "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." To have such a discriminatory attitude was in fact sin. They, in doing so were therefore convicted by that royal law as guilty. That law was recorded in both the Old and New Testaments. Either way, they were guilty.

Lev 19:8 Therefore every one that eateth it shall bear his iniquity, because he hath profaned the hallowed thing of the LORD: and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

Gal 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

III. To Break Any Part of the Law is Sin

James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

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.

James 2:12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

James 2:13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

We won't go over and read them all, but you can find the ten commandments in Exodus Chapter 20. James mentions two of them in verse 11 when he speaks of adultery and murder. We are to keep the whole law, and the reality is that no man except Jesus himself ever kept all of the commandments. If we kept all but one, we would still be guilty of all it says in verse 10.

Eccl 7:20 For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Over in Matthew Chapter 5, Jesus warns that if a man is angry with his brother without a cause, he shall be in danger of the judgment. Further down in verse 27 he speaks of the sin of adultery.

Mat 5:21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

Mat 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Mat 5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

Mat 5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Mat 5:27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

Mat 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Mat 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Mat 5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Mat 5:31 It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

Mat 5:32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

In verse 10, James notes, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” To violate any point of the law makes one guilty of being a law breaker and thence guilty, period. In this case, the transgression was that of the discriminatory attitude some of these Jewish believers had of the affluent over the poor. There likely was a confrontation here with self-righteousness as well. Those who thought highly of themselves by their outward conformity to righteousness were in fact guilty of being a law breaker and thus guilty altogether by their discriminatory attitude.

In verse 11, he offers further example of the law and its Giver. James uses two forms of sin as an example. The God who said do not commit adultery also said, do not kill. If a party is guilty of one but not the other, he is guilty of having broken the law nevertheless. Implicit is that by their breaking the command to love their neighbor as themselves, regardless of their social standing, they were therefore guilty before God, period! It was sin. It was a violation of both the Old Testament law as well as the New Testament law of Christ.

In verse 12, James therefore admonished them, ‘So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.’ We will someday be judged by the Word of God, the perfect law of liberty. We therefore had best so live our lives with that remembrance always in mind. That needs to get down to where we live in what we do and say.

We are enjoined to live without such a foul spirit for we will in fact be judged by the royal law of the Scripture—the perfect law of liberty.

In verse 13, James ends this section with a final warning. “For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.”

For those who have shown no mercy, they can expect no mercy at the judgment someday. Because the epistle is addressed to believers, it must therefore be presumed that James is alluding to the Judgment Seat of Christ. To the contrary, for those who have been merciful, they in that day will glory. For mercy then will rejoice (glory) over judgment.

It is far better to be merciful now and have mercy triumph over judgment at the judgment seat than than for judgment to override any concern for mercy then. The thought returns to the whole matter of being partial to the affluent at the expense of the poor. Far better will it be to show kindness to those of low estate and find God's mercy in that day.

IV. Test of Good Works

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

James 2:15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

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?

James 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

James uses the example of a sister who is naked and destitute of daily food to show how faith must have works to be effective and to have influence on others. If we say that a person should go to church, and we never go, that faith is not going to be very effective.

James is not teaching works for salvation. What he is teaching is that if we have faith, we will have works. They prove the salvation that we have. The bible is clear about what makes up salvation (and what does not).

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

Titus 3:6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

Titus 3:7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Eph 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Rom 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Rom 3:29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

Rom 3:30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

Rom 3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

James now moves to develop more fully the principle of genuine faith. It will manifest itself in the works which result thereafter. Specifically, James continues to address the matter of 'pure religion.' One truly saved will have a righteous attitude toward those less fortunate than himself. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" A fellow claims to have saving faith, but his life shows no evidence thereof.

In this example, there are no works consistent with his profession of faith. In other words, James questions whether such an individual is truly born again. Paul wrote that, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." One truly born again, will evidence the same through his works.

In verse 15, James takes the scenario a step further: "if a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food." Here he poses a situation in which a Christian brother or sister is truly in need. The word translated as naked (gumnov gumnos), in this context, has the sense of 'lacking necessary clothing.' On top of that, they don't have adequate food.

In that context, "And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled." This is what James is driving at—empty professions of faith which have no compassion upon those truly in need. He therefore asks, notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? What good is such an empty faith.

The fact is, it is not true faith—merely the shell thereof. Such empty faith has no advantage.

In verse 17, James presents his preliminary conclusion in the matter. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." A claimed faith which does not effect any change of life is dead. Saving faith, which accompanies the new birth, will bring about a change of life and works.

A born-again Christian may not always do all that he ought to do nor be all that he ought to be. But if he is truly saved, there will be a difference. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature! His life will change from the inside out.

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 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

James 2:20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Lots of people are lacking works for one important reason. They have never met the Savior in the power of Salvation. Verse 19 says that even the devils believe and tremble. When we are saved, there will be fruits to prove we are saved.

I liked what J. Vernon McGee said about these verses.

GOD TESTS FAITH BY GOOD WORKS

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.

James continues, "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." The simple truth is that faith works.

One who claims to have faith (i.e., be saved), yet has not the changed life which accompanies salvation, is merely deceiving himself. To the contrary, James advances how true (saving) faith will be evidenced by the works it produces.

In verse 19, James sets forth a strong illustration of his point. "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." Multitudes profess a belief in God. Yet for most, their 'faith' is merely academic. They have an intellectual faith.

Their faith in God is like other things filed away in their mind. Countless people believe in God about the same way they believe in Abraham Lincoln. In both cases, they acknowledge the historic existence of each.

However, and sadly, for this large category of mankind, their faith in God is only on a historic and academic level. There is almost ironic sarcasm here. James in effect says, 'You believe that there is one God. Great! However, even the demons believe and tremble.'

The devil and his followers know there is a God. To that degree, they have the lowest level of faith, an academic faith. However, their degree of faith is certainly greater than that of many so-called believers.

The devil knows firsthand and from personal experience that there is a God. He and his demons accordingly tremble at that thought. That is more than could be said of some professing believers.

James' comment of "one God" clearly points to his Jewish audience. Though Israel historically had dabbled with idolatry and other gods, they had learned their lesson well through the Babylonian captivity.

However, the point remains. For many of these, even those professing Christ, there was an empty faith which had not transformed their lives to the point of helping others.

In Verse 20, He states his conclusion in the matter. "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" James is not circumventing the

fundamental truth of justification by faith. He is addressing a problem which existed in some early churches. There were those professing faith in Christ which either had never been truly converted, or were spiritually undeveloped.

His greater point is that true faith will effect change in one's life. To profess to be a born-again Christian and have no compassion for other brethren in obvious need revealed an empty faith. It was a faith which was dead. Such claimed faith had never known regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

When we were saved, we were created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Jesus said, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20).

A truly born-again Christian may not do all that he ought to do nor be all that he ought to be. But if he has been born again, there will be a change of life which will manifest itself outwardly. In the case in point, makes clear this will involve compassion for Christian brethren in obvious need.

V. Abraham Justified by Works

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

James 2:22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

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.

These verses have been misunderstood by many, and been used to show that the works that Abraham did justified him before God. But guess what? Abraham was justified 40 years prior to offering Isaac on the altar. The scriptures are clear on this. We must be always clear to rightly divide the word of truth.

Rom 4:1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

Rom 4:2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

Rom 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Rom 4:4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

The works Abraham did prove his salvation, and this is what Abraham was doing, working out his salvation. Abraham was not justified in this act in order to obtain salvation, he had been saved for over 40 years. God called Abraham the friend of God. To be called a friend or a servant of God (as Moses was called), is a great, great honor. This means our minds and bodies are in touch with God and doing His will in our lives.

John 15:14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

A surface reading might seem to suggest that James was advocating a good-works means of justification. To the contrary, he is using a major event in the life of Abraham to illustrate the point already made.

The distilled essence of his case is this. Abraham's faith was justified by what he did. The word translated as justified (di- kaiow dikaioo) has the additional sense to 'exhibit' or to 'evidence.' The simple illustration is that Abraham's faith was evidenced (or, exhibited) by his works.

In Genesis 15:6 it is written, "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." However, the incident involving Isaac on Mount Moriah was decades later. Abraham was justified by faith in Genesis 15:6. Years later, he demonstrated that faith in his utter obedience to God in the trial of Isaac's offering.

His faith thus was evidenced in his willingness to obey God. He believed God would provide a sacrificial substitute. His faith in his Savior was exhibited in what he did on Mount Moriah.

In verse 22, James therefore makes his point once again. "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?"

It was Abraham's faith which motivated him to do what he did in utterly obeying God. Moreover, his obedience in offering Isaac perfected or further matured his faith. The greater idea is that Abraham's faith was perfected through the ordeal he underwent in the matter of offering Isaac.

A secondary theme is at hand—that God will allow trials to further develop faith in us. Also, it is clear that James is not dealing with saving faith at this juncture, but rather living by faith.

Abraham the just, certainly did what he did on Moriah by faith.

God was further teaching him to live by faith.

In verse 23, we find the promise of Genesis 15:6 thus quoted here was fulfilled (or, demonstrated) in Abraham's offering of Isaac. The overall point James is making is that true faith will manifest itself in good works.

He then continues, and he was called the Friend of God. That is a reference to Isaiah 41:8 and II Chronicles 20:7, both of which so refer to Abraham.

Isa 41:8 But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

2 Chr 20:7 Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?

It is of significance that the relationship of Abraham and God as friends is presented in the direct context of Abraham's exhibited faith in God.

Heb 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

James 2:24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

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?

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Verse 25 speaks of Rahab being justified by her works, not when she was saved, but when she hid the messengers of God. Hiding those messengers did not save Rahab, nor anything that Rahab could do save her. It takes God to save the lost soul.

James once again reiterates his point. 'Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.' Out of context, what James has here written seems to contradict the greater body of New Testament truth regarding justification by faith. (For that reason, Luther considered James to be a straw epistle, rejecting its place in the canon.) However, the immediate context is not dealing with justification regarding salvation. Rather, James has been developing the thought that true faith will be justified (that is, demonstrated) in the deeds it produces.

The thought is, 'Ye see then how that by works a man's faith is justified and not just the claim thereof only.' The illustration of Abraham established that. His greater point remains. True saving faith will produce change on the inside which will work its way to the outside and what we actually do. It will develop into living by faith which clearly is evidenced in our actions.

In verse 25, James turns to the Old Testament for another illustration of this same point. Once again, the greater thought is that Rahab the harlot's faith was justified (i.e., evidenced) by her works. Joshua 2:9 and 11 makes clear that Rahab in her heart had turned to Jehovah God in simple faith.

Her assistance and deliverance of the spies thus demonstrated her faith in God. It justified her faith. Recall again that the word translated as justified Her faith was demonstrated by what she did. That is James' whole point.

In verse 26, He concludes this section by noting, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." In further illustrating his point, James makes an interesting statement. He defines death as the absence of the human spirit. A body without the spirit is dead. Likewise, proclaimed faith without following works is dead as well.

True faith will demonstrate itself in what it does. The greater implication of the chapter is that James is strongly hinting that some in the churches to which he is writing were not truly converted. These apparently were those of means, the affluent dealt with earlier in the chapter. It is one thing to profess Christ. It is another to possess Him. Saving faith and the resultant new birth will manifest itself in how we live thereafter. If there are no confirming evidences of such faith, James concludes there was never any faith in the first place. True faith will manifest itself in godly deeds thereafter.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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