

The Believer and Faith

James 2

Overview – Objective Believer: *James 2:1-13*

Regard for Others

In this passage James addresses another temptation, a new test for the believer. When it comes to faith we are not to esteem one over another. Everyone is to be received the same because all are sinners before God (Romans 3:10, 23). Jesus Christ stood out because of His impartiality (Matthew 22:16). He was not impressed with outward appearance but looked within the heart (Matthew 22:41-44). For many, appearance is all that matters, even when it comes to people. Because of this churches are often filled with cliques where only certain individuals are welcome.

An example of partiality was given to help get the point across. Two men entered the assembly at the same time. These men differed greatly in their appearance. One was elaborately dressed while the other was covered in filthy garments. The wealthy man wore fine clothes and a gold ring, which implied he was a person of rank and authority. The Roman senators, and other leaders, wore gold rings to distinguish them from the common people.¹ This well dressed man was generously greeted and given a good place to sit, perhaps near the front where he could be seen. The kind treatment was due to his appearance, since his character remained unknown. Meanwhile, the poor man in vile raiment was rudely ignored. Instead of being given a seat, like the wealthy man, he was directed to stand elsewhere. Apparently the people had no interest in this man. Their actions were based solely on appearance (Matthew 7:1). Nobody knew the heart or motives of either one, yet they favored one over the other.

They were sternly reminded that God ignores social barriers. The poor, whom they despised, were chosen and made rich in God (Psalm 9:18, 68:10, 72:12-13). This is not to say that all the poor will be saved while the rich remain lost, but implies that God is often accepted with the poor before the wealthy. Those that have much in this world tend to trust in their uncertain riches while failing to recognize their sinful condition (1 Timothy 6:17). Proudly they continue seeking the world's treasures while the poor recognize their inability and seek after the Lord. So the poor become rich in Jesus Christ while the rich remain poor spiritually. Because of this, the wealthy have produced many troubles for

*"If the visitor is a Christian, we can accept him because Christ lives in him. If he is not a Christian, we can receive him because Christ died for him."
Warren Wiersbe*

Christians. Their love for the world has led them to blaspheme the worthy name of God and persecute believers. Evidently, the people failed to realize that the wealth of the rich man did not draw him closer to God, and the poverty of the poor man did not alienate him from God.

Chapter Outline

- I. Objective Believer: *James 2:1-13*
 - A. Regard for Others: *James 2:1-7*
 - B. Respect for the Law: *James 2:8-13*
- II. Active Believer: *James 2:14-26*
 - A. Dead Faith: *James 2:14-20*
 - B. Demonstrated Faith: *James 2:21-26*

¹ John Gill, "Gill's Commentary on the Bible: James," (Bible Truth Forum: E-book, 2005) p. 29

Respect for the Law

Here we find a challenge concerning obedience. The law makes it clear we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Leviticus 19:18). This was confirmed by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 19:19). There are no exceptions in this matter. Everyone should be treated as decent human beings no matter what their social standing is. The reaction of some may have been to believe this was a minor issue, a small matter. James dealt with this thought by reminding the readers of accountability. It is pointed out that the breaking of one law renders guilt even if the rest of the law is maintained. It does not mean that sinners are equally guilty but that when the law is broken in any way it produces guilt. In other words, they could not continue with their partiality and believe to be above blame. One act of disobedience makes one guilty of sin. It is an important issue because our treatment of others says a lot about our relationship with God (1 John 4:20).

As they continued, their conduct was to be in line with the law of liberty, which was the Word of God (James 1:25). Believers are no longer burdened by the law but have been set free so they can live unto God. (Galatians 5:13, 6:2). Obedience to God's commands is no longer a have to but a want to. This means others are to be treated correctly simply because we love the Lord.

Overview – Active Believer: *James 2:14-26*

Dead Faith

The letter continued to examine the authenticity of faith. One may claim to be saved, even boast of their faith, but if there is no evidence of a changed life is it true faith? Is their profit or benefit to their faith? It is possible to have the knowledge of salvation without being saved, or to speak the correct words without having faith. Jesus Christ made it clear that some would have dead faith (Matthew 7:21). This is faith without regeneration, words only without any change within. This type of faith is characterized by selfishness, inconsideration, and hypocrisy. It boasts greatly of itself but offers no evidence of its existence. When confronted with a brother or sister in need, it provides kind words but no assistance. This is not true faith, but a cold heartless attitude. It is dead faith. Keep in mind James did not question faith's ability to save but the individual's faith itself. There are many whose lives would be the same without Christianity, the only difference would be where they spent Sunday morning. Obviously some would argue that it is possible to have faith without works, so James offered a challenge, "shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." There is no possible way to prove faith without works. If you have faith you will have works and if you have works it is because you have faith.

True faith goes beyond knowledge and understanding, which is what the devils possess. They believe and know He is the one true God. In the scriptures the evil spirits never deny His existence. They are not atheists, that foolishness is reserved for mankind (Psalm 14:1, 53:1). If one simply needed to believe to be saved, the devils would qualify for salvation. They even tremble fearfully before God but we know they do not

Dead Faith of the Devils

- Believe in the One God. *James 2:19*
- Believe in the Deity of Jesus Christ. *Mark 3:11-12*
- Believe in Jesus Christ as judge. *Mark 5:1-13*
- Believe in eternal punishment. *Luke 8:31*
- Believe but not regenerated. *Matthew 7:21*

belong to Him. They have faith but it is not faith that changes. True faith results in regeneration, which yields good fruit or works (Titus 3:5; Galatians 5:22-25). The believer will love God and live after the Spirit (Romans 8:5).

Demonstrated Faith

The chapter ends with two examples of active faith. James could not have chosen two more different people. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation, whose life was marked with great faith and obedience. He was highly regarded by the Jewish people. On the other hand, Rahab was relatively unknown and often forgotten. She was a female Gentile that lived an immoral life before trusting God. The purpose for mentioning these two was to show that true faith would result in works. The passage refers to two events in Abraham's life. When he believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness and years later when he obeyed God's command to offer up Isaac (Genesis 15:6, 22).

Did Paul and James disagree?

Paul wrote concerning faith and justification before salvation – he talked about the root of faith.

James wrote about faith and justification after salvation – he talked about the fruit of faith.

Both talked about the same faith but a different work. Paul the work of the law for salvation and James the work produced by the Spirit in the life of a true believer.

Together, both accounts provide evidence of Abraham's faith. Notice, it says the scripture was fulfilled not his salvation. Abraham had faith the moment he believed in God, but it was not verified until it was displayed with his obedience. He was made righteous by grace and through faith, and when tested, his works manifested his true faith (Galatians 3:6).

Rahab's faith was also seen through her actions. When told of God's plan, she believed and agreed to assist the spies (Joshua 2; Hebrews 11:31). Later when the Israelites took the city, Rahab did as directed (Joshua 6:17-25). Had she not acted it would have proven her faith to be dead. Instead, her obedient conduct displayed true faith. It is concluded that without works, faith has no power or value. Just as there is no life in the body without the soul, there is no life in faith without works.

Questions for Consideration

Why is it wrong to judge based upon appearance?

Why is it difficult for the wealthy to trust in God?

What does the law say about our treatment of others?

What is meant by a dead faith?

What is evidence of true faith?

What evidence did Abraham have of faith?

How did Rahab display her faith?

Has there been a change in your life?

Do you desire the things of God?

Can others tell that you are saved?

Points to Ponder

Are all the same before God?

Everyone is born with a sinful nature, which results in filthy deeds. To be forgiven and accepted, one must go to God through His Son Jesus Christ. You see, before God we are all guilty sinners in need of redemption. Our social standing matters not.

Is the law broken with one offence?

A man may never rob a store but if he is pulled over for going over the speed limit he has broken the law and is considered an offender. He cannot use his obedience in other matters to cover his disobedient actions. The same is true with God's law.

Is there really dead faith?

All good things are counterfeited, including God's plans. The devil is the greatest counterfeiter of all and has established many religions that appear good but deny the power of Jesus Christ for salvation. Dead faith trusts in other sources instead of God alone.

What is it to be justified?

Justification is when a believing sinner is declared righteous before God. It is not a process by which we do good works but is done by God based upon the sinner's belief of Christ's finished work on the cross. It is an act, done once and for all.

What about works and justification?

Action is evidence of life, similar to a heartbeat. If there are no works than it is proof there is no life. It matters not what we say but how we live. A person cannot be justified if they are living in the world. Good works provide evidence of justification.