

JAMES CHAPTER TWO BY CLINTON WERNER - FAVORITISM & FAITH (1 JULY 2018)

Today we go into part 2 in our series on the book of James.

The book of James was written by James, the younger brother of Jesus. It is written to Jewish believers. As mentioned by Alan last week, the book of James can be a little controversial and heavy if it is taken in the wrong context. So, today I will do my best to back up all I say with other scriptures.

James Chapter 2 is broken down into 2 main segments ...

- Part 1 - Favoritism (James 2:1-13)
- Part 2 - Faith (James 2:14-26)

So, let's get into it. Today I am using the New Living Translation version...

PART 1: FAVORITISM! (James 2:1-13)

James 2:1... My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?

James Chapter 2 gets straight to the point. There is no beating around the bush. James asks, how can you claim to have faith in Jesus Christ if you show favoritism? According to God's word, we should not show prejudice or discriminate against people.

A) DON'T SHOW FAVORITISM – GOD HATES IT!

It reminds me of an experiment that was done where a beautiful attractive lady went into a pharmacy. She went to the counter and asked for some assistance. The man behind the counter smiled and went out of his way to assist her, even going down the aisle with her to help her find all she needed. Nothing was too much of a problem. After leaving the store, makeup artists got to work on this beautiful lady and with some special effects, make up and some old dirty clothes, they transformed her into an ugly old tramp, and then sent her back into the same pharmacy. She was served by the same man at the counter however her experience was completely different. This time the same man did not smile at her, he was not as helpful. In fact, he didn't even want to accompany her down the aisle to help her find her product. When she asked for a little extra help, the assistant just rolled his eyes and sighed and then reluctantly continued to assist her.

It is interesting to see the different service that the attractive young woman received compared to the post service that the old ugly and dirty woman received.

There is a lot of discrimination these days. Favoritism is often showed based on social standing, color of skin, whether a person is rich or poor, and ... GOD HATES THIS!

We need to be impartial. We should not be judging on outward appearance. Sometimes we may judge people on how they look, or on how they talk, or on how they dress or on how much they have or don't have.

“It is wrong to show favoritism when passing judgment.” (Proverbs 24:23)

“Then Peter replied, “I see very clearly that God shows no favoritism.” (Acts 10:34)

We have a lot of discrimination and racial tension in our country at present. As Gods Children, we need to make a positive difference.

It is wrong to judge people based on external appearance - based on the what they look like, or how they may dress, or based on what car they drive, or where they live, or shop. These external issues are not important in the eyes of God.

B) GOD DOES NOT JUDGE ON EXTERNAL APPEARANCE – HE LOOKS AT THE HEART

In 1 Samuel 16, it tells how God told the prophet Samuel to go approach a man named Jesse because God had selected one of his sons to be the next King.

So, at Gods instruction, Samuel invited Jesse and his sons to a ceremony. When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab, the oldest well-built son of Jesse, and thought, “Surely this is the Lord’s anointed!”

In 1 Samuel 16:7 it says “... the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him.”

One by one Jesse lined all 7 of his sons up but the prophet declared that none of these sons were the one that the Lord has chosen. Then Samuel asked, “Are these all the sons you have?” Jesse then said “There is still the youngest. He was obviously thinking it cannot be David. I left him out in the fields to watch the sheep and goats. (I have 4 sons, and I can resonate with Jesse!)

The prophet asked for David to be brought to them without delay. When Samuel saw David, God showed him that David was the one, and he anointed David as the future King.

In 1 Samuel 16:7 it goes on to say that ...The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

God looks at the heart. His ways are higher than ours.

“For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:9)

“For the Lord your God shows no partiality and cannot be bribed.” (Deuteronomy 10:17)

I want to therefore encourage you not judge people by things that are unimportant to God. God’s measuring stick is different to ours. God has compassion on all people.

If you have accepted Jesus Christ, you are a child of God, and part of his kingdom.

Ephesians 2:13 says... Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.... God has united us into one people.... It says that when Jesus died on the cross, he broke down the walls of separation.

“There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

C) GODS KINGDOM IS COLORBLIND & CLASS FREE - WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST

The barrier was broken by the cross. Gods Kingdom does not judge based on external appearances. Gods Kingdom is color blind and is a class free zone. If you are a child of God, then we are all one in Christ Jesus.

James then gives us an example of how this works out in the Church...

²For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. ³If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor”—well, ⁴doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

This would be blatant discrimination. If we acted like this, we would be showing that we are guided by wrong motives. We are NOT to show favoritism based on if a person is rich or poor. We are NOT to discriminate.

I know that our church does not discriminate between the rich and poor or on people based on color of skin. Thank God for this. But we as Children of God must be careful that we do not show favoritism or discriminate in our personal lives.

In Luke 18 & 19 it shows a parallel picture of a poor blind beggar and the rich tax collector who was known as a bit of a corrupt gangster. Interestingly we don’t know the blind beggars name, but we know the rich influential man’s name was Zacchaeus. Both these men met Jesus. One from the gutter-most part of society and one from the utter-most part of society. Both their lives where forever changed. Both found new life. Jesus did not show favoritism.

We are not to judge based on social standing or on the level of influence. God made all people and according to the book of Genesis, God made all of us in his image.

“I am the Lord, the God of all the peoples of the world. Is anything too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:27)

Because of sin we “all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” (Romans 3:23)

But thank God that He sent Jesus to pay the price for all of us. Without Jesus our eternity is at risk and we would be in serious trouble.

In James 2:5-7, James goes on and deals with the issue between the rich & and poor ...

⁵Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn’t God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren’t they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? ⁶But you dishonor the poor! Isn’t it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? ⁷Aren’t they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?

According to James, we must make sure that we do not dishonor the poor. We must reach out to the poor and needy. We need to show real love.

James also asks how we can show favoritism to some godless wealthy people who blaspheme our Savior and oppress people. In this scripture it may look like James is attacking the rich. But he is

not. How do I know this? Well, later in James Chapter 2, he speaks highly of Abraham and again in Chapter 4 he uses Job as a good example. Both Abraham and Job were super wealthy. God is not against rich people, but he is against wealthy people who use their wealth to oppress others and those who take advantage of the poor and live godless lives.

In James 2:8-9... James continues and speaks about the royal law and how showing favoritism is a sin...

⁸ Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ⁹ But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.

What is this royal law? The royal law is to LOVE GOD & LOVE PEOPLE.

Let's face it, in worldly terms it may be more beneficial to show favoritism to people of influence or to hang out with people who are successful. We are often impressed by fame and fortune, BUT as Children of God we cannot show favoritism. It is a sin. We need to show love and compassion to all.

Just by the way ... If an elderly person comes into the church, it is not discriminatory to give up your seat for them. This is just good manners and is showing love.

In James 2:10-11, if we break any of God's laws we are guilty...

¹⁰ For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws. ¹¹ For the same God who said, "You must not commit adultery," also said, "You must not murder." So if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.

In the Gospels Jesus said that even if you look at a woman with lust in your heart you are committing adultery. He also said that even if you are angry with someone, it is the same as committing murder.

What James is saying is that we are all sinners, even if you break the smallest law we are guilty and fall short of God's standard. Thank God that Jesus came to save us!

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:16-17)

Do you see God's heart? He loves ALL people, irrespective of color or education or level in society. We desperately need a Savior. We need Jesus.

In James 2:12-13, James finally sums up his warning about showing favoritism. He says...

¹² So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free.

¹³ There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.

James says that we will be judged by the "law that sets you free". What is this?

Well, Jesus Christ paid the full price for sin for ALL PEOPLE, whether rich or poor, when he shed his blood and died on the cross so that all people have the opportunity to find eternal life. Because of

the finished work of Jesus, we now fall under a New Covenant. The Old Testament Laws used to condemn us, but Jesus Christ now offers the “law that sets us free”.

Just like Jesus shows us his mercy, love, and grace, so we should also show mercy and love to others.

The kingdom of God is a class-free and colorblind zone. All who accept Jesus Christ as Lord are Gods Children and are therefore acceptable to God. He has no favorites. Jesus is supreme, and He offers unconditional love. We cannot earn it. We do not deserve it. The barriers are broken down by the cross.

D) IF YOU WANT MERCY THEN SHOW MERCY

Also, if you want mercy, you need to show mercy. Do you know what God’s mercy is? It is when He chooses to withhold the punishment we deserve. James clearly says that if you have been merciful, God will be merciful to you.

In Luke 6:37 – 38, Jesus says...

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Do not judge based on outward appearance. Show love, show mercy, show undeserved favor, and it will come back to you in multiples. Show FAVOR instead of FAVORITISM.

Thank God that mercy triumphs over judgement. Instead of showing favoritism, show underserved favor to all.

So, let us wrap up PART ONE:

Don’t show favoritism – God hates it. Jesus doesn’t discriminate. He doesn’t show favoritism. Jesus did not die only for certain people. He didn’t die only for the rich or only for the poor or only for the famous or for only those in need. He died for all people, so that we can know his mercy and his grace. By the way... Grace is God’s kindness, it is His “underserved favor”.

Don’t judge on external appearance. We often judge on external appearance. When we do this, we are standing on dangerous ground.

Our social standing, our education, or the color of the skin makes NO difference to God. Our wealth or lack of it is irrelevant. God is colorblind, and His Kingdom is class-free. He does not show favoritism. He died and shows his mercy, and His underserved favor to all people – this includes you!

So instead of showing favoritism, rather show mercy and underserved favor, and mercy and underserved favor will come to you. Show FAVOR instead of FAVORITISM.

By the way... Do you know Jesus as your Savior? If not, give your heart to Him. Invite Him in.

Now let’s continue and go straight into the second half of James 2. It deals with FAITH & WORKS.

Part 2 – FAITH! (James 2:14-26)

Now in James 2:14-17 James addresses the whole concept of how faith without works is dead. He writes...¹⁴ What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? ¹⁵ Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, ¹⁶ and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? ¹⁷ So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

A) FAITH WITHOUT ACTION IS DEAD & USELESS!

James is basically saying that if you claim to have faith, but you do not show it by your actions, then your faith is dead and useless! In other words, real faith is demonstrated by real action.

If someone is in need and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well... I will pray for you"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?"

Lip service is not enough. Intentions are not enough. Your talk must match your walk!
Yes, it is good to pray for people in need, but prayer was never meant to be a substitute for action.

According to James, we need to show love. We need to show some action. Faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless."

If you are a doctor, but do not use your expertise to help a sick person, it's useless!
Similarly, if you do not use your God-given talents and spiritual gifts, that God has blessed you with, to help others, then your faith is of no use. (Acts 3.1 is great example of faith in action)

Eating cheese does not make you a mouse, just like going to church doesn't make one a Christian. In the same way, faith without action is useless!

In James 2:18, James goes on and basically says you need to show you faith, not by what you say, but by what you DO...

¹⁸ Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

James championed a faith that works hard... He wants to see action! James says that if your faith is not accompanied by outward action it is dead. This has caused a lot of confusion over the years. So, let us break this down...

B) REAL FAITH IS MORE THAN HEAD KNOWLEDGE

What is faith?

Hebrews 11:1 ... "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
Hebrews 11:6 ... "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Faith is us putting our confidence in God. It is trusting Him. Faith in God is essential to our walk with God.

In James 2:19, James makes it clear that just believing in your head is not enough...

¹⁹ You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. ²⁰ How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

Believing is not enough. James says that, "Even the demons believe; and tremble in fear. Why? Because they know who Jesus is and know where they will spend their eternity ... in the fires of hell.

So, we need saving faith!

It is not enough to just believe. You can have all the head knowledge about God, but you need to know Him personally as your Savior.

Do you know where your eternal destination will be? Is your eternity secure? If not, I would seriously recommend that you get your relationship with God right. Put your faith in Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul says ...“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith 'and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God 'not by works, so that no one can boast.

The NLT says... God saved you by his grace (underserved favour) when you believed. And you can't take credit for it, it is a (free) gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

In other words, Jesus paid the full price for us on the cross. All we can do is put our trust, our confidence, our faith in God, and receive this free gift of grace.

This seems to contradict James who says that “faith without works is dead”

But Paul goes on and says ...Ephesians 2:10...For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Just as clearly as Paul said we weren't saved by works, he immediately adds that we are created in Christ to do good works that God had planned for us to do.

You cannot work or do enough things to be saved. Salvation is by faith, through grace. You can only have the security of eternal life and know you are saved if you take the free gift of grace that Jesus purchased for you on the cross. God did for ALL for you.

C) SALVATION IS A GIFT FROM GOD – YOU CANNOT EARN IT, BUT IT SHOULD LEAD TO ACTION

However, if God has truly saved you, then you should want to be a blessing to others, and you should reach out to Impact other people's lives with good deeds.

James seems dissatisfied with people who talked the talk but never got around to walking the walk. Faith without action is dead.

So just to be clear: We cannot work our way into heaven. We cannot earn our forgiveness. We can't earn our way into a closer walk with God. Jesus did it all. We need to just put our faith in God.

Let me give you an example:

Let's say, I was caught speeding. The traffic officer gives me a fine that I must pay for my offence. I therefore need to pay the fine to clear my record. However, let's say my brother pays the full fine on my behalf - then I am let off the hook. I would be free, as he would have paid the fine for me.

Let's say I committed a crime and had to go to jail, but once again my brother steps in, and took the rap for me. My brother would then go to jail for my crime. He would be the one charged, and I would go free. This would not be fair! It would be an undeserved free gift.

Well, that is exactly what Jesus did for you and me. He paid the price for our sins.

God put laws in place. We broke them. This left us guilty, cut-off from God, with our eternity at risk. But on the cross Jesus took our place, and because of his finished work, we can be set free and made right with God. This is grace. It is God's undeserved favor.

I do not deserve it. I cannot earn it. It is free.

This is what God did for you and I. If you do not know Him, today you can take this free gift.

Now back to my example...If my brother gave his life for me. If he took the rap for me and paid the full price for my crime, do you not think I would want to show him how grateful I was? I would want to show him love. I wouldn't just say thank you. I would not just tell him I was grateful... lip service would not be appropriate... I would be spurred on to show love with action!

Now, knowing that Jesus gave his life for me on the cross, how can I sit back and have faith in Him, without actions. He saved me from the fires of hell! He paid the price for my sins! He made a way for a sinful messed up man like myself to find forgiveness. How can I not reach out and want to love Him and serve Him with my whole heart?

Surely this would spur me on to action! No wonder James said that faith without works is dead. Our faith should spur us on to action. Without action our faith is dead!

If I am truly grateful for what God has done ... how can I just plod through life without doing good deeds. If I really know God and am aware of his incredible grace and mercy, my life will be transformed, and I will want to do good works to please and honor God.

How can I not reach out and share this good news? Some people are dying without a Savior. We have a duty to share the good news of God's mercy and grace with a lost and hurting world. Life doesn't end at the grave. It continues into eternity. Each of us will spend our eternity either with God (in Heaven) or separated from God (in the fires of Hell). How can my faith not drive me to action in sharing the Good News that there is a Savior who wants to see all mankind saved.

Out of love and gratitude towards God, I want to impact my world with good deeds.

These good deeds don't save me. They flow out in action because I want to be a blessing to God and I want to please him because of what he did for me.

If you love someone and are grateful for them, your love will show it. It is more than lip service. Your love will drive you to action.

Faith without works is therefore dead. Yes, we are saved by faith in God's grace alone, but real faith will produce action.

A dead tree produces no fruit, but a living tree should be fruitful! Shouldn't fruit be evident in our lives. Jesus said "... you will know a tree by its fruit" (Matthew 7:16). Jesus also told us that "his desire is to see us produce much fruit" (John 15:5). Surely the fruit of action should be evident in our lives if we had faith in God!

We need to live out what we believe. Faith in Jesus Christ should lead to action. We should show love. We should be using our gifts. We should be a blessing. You see, if Jesus really saved you, how can you keep quiet, how can you not reach out to those that are lost bruised and battered? Do you have fruit of action evident in your life?

In James 2:21-24, God gives Abraham as an example of faith and action...

²¹ Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. ²³ And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. ²⁴ So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

In Genesis 22, Abraham was prepared to offer his beloved son as a sacrifice to God. When Isaac asked his Dad where the sacrificial lamb was, Abraham told his son that God will provide. And God did provide a ram (a male lamb).

Abraham's faith in God led to action, and because of this he was made right with God, and God even called Abraham his friend.

Around 2000's years later, God sent his own son, his beloved son up the same mountain range. While Isaac carried wood up the mountain, Jesus carried a heavy wooden cross. But Jesus went all the way to the highest peak, Mount Calvary, where he paid the price for the sins of all people.

Do you realize how much God loves you? God stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, but Jesus went all the way to redeem us. The punishment for our sin fell on the pure spotless Lamb of God. We are made right with God through faith alone, for Jesus did the full work on the cross. Put your faith in him. Let your faith in God move you into action to be a blessing to those God brings across your path.

In James 2:25, James concludes his thoughts on faith by sharing the story about Rahab. He writes...

²⁵ Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.

Rahab was a prostitute. But when she found faith in God, her life changed. Rahab could have taken the easy way out and had the spies arrested but she chose to help them out. Rahab's step of faith led to her becoming the great-grandmother of David the greatest of all the kings of Israel.

She took a step of faith, just like Peter did when he stepped out of the boat and walked on the stormy water. Yes, when Peter took his eyes off Jesus, he started to sink, but when he cried out to Jesus, Jesus saved him.

Is God calling you to attempt great things for God?

While Peter was in the boat there was no miracle. When he took the step of faith the miracle happened. Step out. Dare to risk for God.

Sometimes our faith is tested. At these times you need to trust in God knowing that he is for you and not against you. Knowing he has your best interests at heart. Knowing that he will never leave you nor forsake you. Yes, in this world we will face trouble, but Jesus has told us that we can take heart. If God is for you and with you, you will be ok.

Finally in James 2:26, James sums it all up by saying...

²⁶Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

This is the key to the relationship between faith and works.

It is faith alone that saves us; but if that faith does not produce good works, then it's not real faith. It's dead.

God has called us to have a living, vibrant faith; a faith that results in works; a faith that brings about personal transformation, a closer walk with God and a faith that reaches out to the lost and hurting and attempts great things for God.

So, let us wrap up PART TWO:

Faith without works is dead and useless! Faith is more than just head knowledge. Faith is putting our confidence in God.

Salvation is a gift from God. It is free, and it was PAID IN FULL by the blood of Jesus on the cross. Because of the FINISHED WORK of Jesus, and only because of this, can you and I have a relationship with God. Salvation is a gift from God. You cannot earn it. You do not deserve it. It is a gift – it's free!

This gift of salvation should produce fruit. Our faith should therefore lead to good works and action, for faith without action is dead and useless!

So, in conclusion:

1. Don't show favoritism. Do not discriminate. God is the God of all the peoples of the world and all who are part of God's Kingdom are ONE in Christ. Irrespective of color, or social standing, Gods Kingdom is colorblind and class free, so DO NOT show favoritism. Rather show underserved favor and love to all people. Show FAVOR instead of FAVORITISM.
2. You are saved only by God's grace. You cannot earn or work for your salvation. It is a free-gift PAID IN FULL by the FINISHED WORK of Jesus on the cross. This should lead to a changed life and should produce some fruit. Let your FAITH result in ACTION, for faith without action is dead and useless.

Let's pray... Dear Father. I come to you in Jesus name.

- *Lord forgive us for showing favoritism & for discriminating against people.*
- *Lord please break down the dividing walls of discrimination and injustice in our land.*
- *Please bless our Nation and bring us together irrespective of our differences.*
- *Help us to show love, mercy, and underserved favor to all peoples that you bring across our path. Help us to show FAVOR instead of FAVORITISM.*
- *Lord help us to know that we are saved purely by us putting our faith in you. Break off the "works mentality" and help us to understand your grace & mercy. Thank you that we can have a close walk with you, not because of what we do, but because of what Jesus did on the cross for us. We are so grateful for your love.*
- *Lord may your underserved love for us, spur us on to attempt great things for you. May our FAITH in you spur us on to ACTION, that not only pleases you, but brings transformation to those you bring across our path.*
- *We ask you to fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit. We ask for you to equip us, and to empower us, to do great things that bring love and freedom to those in need. Anoint us and empower us with your Holy Spirit. Let your gifts be activated and flow out of our lives, as we do the works you have called us to.*
- *We love you. We thank you. We ask for your blessing and favor.*

In Jesus name. Amen