

Epistle of James

Chapter 2

Swift to Hear: hearing God's Word to show complete impartiality (2:1-13)

1. Believers, and certainly church leaders, are not to use partiality based on worldly measures of human worth, dignity, or status (2:1-7).
 - a. Those who appear to be wealthy should be treated as equals with those who appear to be poor.
 - b. Neither group should be treated differently among the fellowship of the body because all are brothers and equals in the body of Christ.
 - c. Any action taken or words spoken with partiality are strictly forbidden.
 - d. The prohibition against partiality is supported by Psalm 82:3 among other passages.
2. Reasons why partiality is ungodly and forbidden for believers.
 - a. Partiality makes men the judge of others in the church rather than God or His word.
 - b. Partiality behavior reveals the evil heart of the one who judges in an ungodly manner.
 - c. Partiality focuses on material and earthly measures rather than on the spiritual/eternal.
 - d. Partiality discriminates against those who are loved and honored by God.
 - e. Partiality dishonors, shames, devalues, and insults the other person.
 - f. Partiality disregards God's will for the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of His kingdom.
 - g. Partiality blasphemes the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Brethren are to observe the Royal Law of Scripture which clearly opposes partiality (2:8-13)
 - a. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," (Lev. 19:18). Following this law is commendable. Failure to follow the law brings rebuke.
 - b. Partiality is not loving, but sinful. Those who show partiality are convicted by God's moral standards as transgressors.
 - c. Failure on any single point of the Law makes the transgressor guilty of the whole Law.
 - d. The Royal Law demands that we do and speak as those who will be judged by the commandment to love our neighbors as we love ourselves and as we want to be treated.
 - e. Merciless judgement from God is expected for those who fail to show mercy to others in their judgments.
 - f. Mercy triumphs over judgement! Therefore, show mercy with cheerfulness (Rom. 12:8).
 - i. If God is able to show mercy to us for all our transgressions, we therefore have no excuse for not showing mercy to others.
 - ii. God demonstrates His loving and gracious nature by showing abundant mercy to all who come to Him by faith even though He would be perfectly righteous and justified to show them punishment and condemnation instead.

Swift to Hear: God's command to integrate faith and works (2:14-26)

1. James has already addressed his letter to "brethren" (1:2, 1:16, 1:19, 2:1, 2:5), so his letter is for those who have already made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.
2. James does not claim that works results in salvation, but rather that salvation results in works.

3. James asks a rhetorical question about what profit is gained in the Body by a slothful Christian.
 - a. Does the believer who does not work actually generate profit (provide value) for the kingdom of God? [little to none]
 - b. Can a man have genuine faith and yet not then do good works? [No]
 - c. Can faith without good works actually result in eternal salvation? [No]
4. James explains the clear relationship between faith and works.
 - a. Genuine faith will always produce good works so long as there is an opportunity to do so (deathbed confessions are certainly not in focus here).
 - b. Human beings act in accordance with what they believe. Faith in anything produces action that reveals that the faith is genuine or real (e.g. banks, rules of the road, locked doors).
 - c. Under trials (chapter 1) the depth and genuineness of truth faith is typically revealed.
 - d. A “believer” who lives a life that is completely unchanged after accepting Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit casts serious doubt about the person’s faith and salvation status.
 - e. Empty words have little worth in comparison to profitable good deeds. For example, how someone with means treats a person who is naked and destitute of all things.
 - i. Telling someone in this situation to depart, be warmed and filled will accomplish nothing for that person. This is logical and obvious regarding material needs.
 - ii. Instead of using only words, what is necessary to render aid to the naked and destitute person is to actually provide them with clothing to keep them warm.
 - iii. Likewise, we must also provide the hungry with food that will nourish them.
 - iv. Words alone fail to render aid, but actual meeting actual needs is profitable for both the one in need and the one who is called upon to show mercy.
 - f. In the same way, James declares that anyone who claims to have faith without but does nothing in response to his faith is manifesting a dead, worthless faith.
 - i. Their faith is dead and powerless to bring them to God through Christ.
 - ii. Dead faith results in actual death of the soul when judgement comes.
5. James’ hypothetical conversation with someone denying that faith and works are both necessary.
 - a. Question: if one has faith and one has works, is there really a difference?
 - b. Answer: yes, but both are necessary for the believer’s submitted relationship to Christ.
 - c. Man has no true capacity to evaluate someone’s faith; all man can do is to evaluate a person’s actions and the works done in faith.
 - i. Without works faith make faith impossible to discern.
 - ii. With works, there is amply reason to believe that a person’s faith is genuine, though only God knows for certain those who are His and those who reject Him.
 - d. Belief or acceptance of facts is not the same as having true faith from the heart
 - i. Many created beings believe in one God, but certainly not all who believe are saved.
 - ii. Believing in one God is the right start and is commendable, but more is required.
 - iii. Even demons, who have no hope of salvation, believe this truth about God. They tremble with the knowledge they have and what judgment will come to them, but they have no hope of being saved by mere belief.
6. James’ unambiguous conclusion is that faith without works is dead. He further declares that anyone who claims otherwise is foolish and lacks understanding of proper doctrine.
7. Abraham, the Father of Faith, is the exemplar of James’ doctrine of faith plus works.
 - a. Abraham’s faith was confirmed by his action of offering his beloved son on the altar.

- b. Abraham is the perfect example of faith and works given in scripture. The “Father of Faith” is shown to have believed God in faith which compelled Him to obey God and to do what Abraham would otherwise consider unthinkable.
 - c. Demonstrated through his works, Abraham’s faith was accounted to him as righteousness.
 - d. If believers also want to have their personal faith accounted to them as righteousness leading to salvation, their faith requires that good works will follow just as Abraham’s did.
 - e. Notice that God, who already knew the faith in Abraham’s heart, still required him to do works. This was for Abraham’s own benefit of seeing his own faith in action.
 - f. Abraham’s example of faith in action is also recorded for all the world to learn from.
8. Because Abraham was so faithful in his works, he is called the friend of God.
9. All doubt should be removed. Faith without works is dead and a man is justified by faith that produces good works.
10. James then offers us a Gentile’s example of faith and works in Rahab the harlot (shocking)!
- a. Rahab knew of God’s powerful working through Israel by the report of others.
 - b. Rahab understood that her own nation had no chance of defeating Israel who had God on their side.
 - c. Rahab perceived that she would perish unless she appealed to God’s mercy by faith.
 - d. However, all this knowledge would not have saved Rahab’s life without faith and works.
 - e. Rather, Rahab had to send out the spies of Israel as a demonstration of her faith. It was this faith and work in action that saved her life and placed her into the hall of faith (Heb. 11:31).
11. Conclusion – faith without works is dead; dead faith offers no hope or profit for salvation.
- a. Just as the human body without the spirit is dead...
 - b. So also, faith without works is dead!
12. Observations on this challenging passage concerning works.
- a. James’s message never offers a call to salvation.
 - b. James is commanding believers to understand to accept that works will always flow from true salvation in faith.
 - c. A believer’s works, based on a profession of faith, are not the same as the works of the law.
 - d. The message of Romans and Galatians is not to be confused with the message from James.
 - i. There is no contradiction between the two apostles and their writings.
 - ii. Galatians explains *why* the Law of Moses has no power at all to save anyone.
 - iii. Romans explains that the Law was given to *reveal* our sins and to *prove* that sinners need a solution apart from attempted obedience to the Law.
 - iv. James does not mention the Law of Moses in in this passage. He is clearly not associating the “works of faith” with the “works of the Law” as Paul does in his letters.
 - e. Confusion about faith and works comes from a misunderstanding of interpretation, but the Holy Spirit and the writers of the New Testament are not confused about these distinctions.
 - f. Faith alone opens the door to salvation, but works done by faith confirm to ourselves and to others that we are on the correct path that leads to eternal life through faith in Christ.