

The Nature of True Faith

An Exegesis of James 2

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The second chapter of James has to be one of the most misunderstood chapters of the Bible. Taken out of context, as many so often do, we could accuse James of being in error on the doctrine of objective justification and a supporter of work-righteousness. That is, of course, if we would take his inspired words out of context.

In our study of this chapter we must keep two points constantly in front of us. They are:

- 1) James was writing to Jewish *Christians*. He is talking to people who have already been converted. He had no need of speaking about objective justification. Why? ...
- 2) These Jewish Christians had sluggish faith. Their problem was with subjective justification and their lives of sanctification. They felt a mere profession of faith was all that was needed to be a Christian.

As we will see, James handles their problem very evangelically, but yet, he is not afraid to tell it like it is. James chapter two easily divides itself into two parts:

I. Avoid discrimination 2:1-13

II. Avoid an inactive faith 2:14-26

I. Avoid Discrimination 2:1-13

Verse 1:

Literally: “My brothers, hold not the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory, in partiality.”

James begins fraternally by calling these Christians, “my brothers.” Lovingly, he is going to admonish a group of believers. They are called believers because of their faith (πιστις).

He exhorts them not to make a habit of holding their faith in partiality. *προσοπολημια* (partiality) means to lift up the face of a person; be favorable to him when you see who it is. Just as God is no respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11; Col. 3:25); always fair, just and righteous, we as his followers are to make that our goal. James is telling them to respect people (Christians) only for their relation and conformity to their Lord Jesus Christ.

της δοξης I feel is in apposition to the του χριστου clause. Some take it to be a qualitative genitive, “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.” James, however, plays by the rules of grammar and I feel he would have included it within the του χριστου clause. Jesus is called “the Glory” else where. Please confer Rom. 9:4; II Cor. 4:6; Eph. 1:17. Christ is all-glorious and Christianity should in no way dishonor the Lord.

Applying this passage to ourselves as pastors could cause us some discomfort. Isn't it easy to show partiality to certain members; the ones we get to be chums with. It becomes easy for us to close one eye when they really would need a preaching of the law. James reminds us to look at the value of all the souls of our congregations, the ones we golf with, and also the ones that give us headaches every now and then. Not only pastors but all Christians should ask themselves this question: “Do both God and my neighbor see me as a

Christian showing love and respect for all men regardless of their position in life? By the grace of God may the answer be “yes” in all cases!

Verse 2:

Literally: “For if a man with gold rings on his fingers come into your synagogue in bright clothing, and if a poor man also enter in dirty clothing,”

Rich man - poor man, part 1. James uses a condition, “what if this were to happen in your church?” Two men enter. On one hand you have a rich man, evident because of the rings on his fingers. (In New Testament times rings meant affluence!) On the other hand, you have a man looking like a bum. His appearance is shabby. He’s dirty and ragged, perhaps like what stumbles into our rescue missions today.

Verse 3:

Literally: “and if you look at the one wearing the bright clothing and say, ‘Sit here in a good place,’ but say to the poor man, ‘Stand here or sit there beside my footstool,’”

The usher sees these two come into church and gives the rich man the best seat. Everyone is obviously delighted to have such an honored guest present in their church. Every one is obviously drooling over his apparent wealth.

The KJV could get in hot water here with their rendering of λαμπραν as “gay” (clothing). Bright or shiny would be better.

The poor man, however, is asked to stand in the back or sit on the floor by the footstool. This was degrading. Conquerors placed their feet on the necks of their victims. In Luke 20:43 Jesus said, “Till I make thane enemies thy footstool.” He was referring to a Psalm of David in which God’s enemies would be made subject to the Lord. The poor man in this verse is put through this same degrading and insulting subjection, only by his peers.

In verses two and three James gives Christians today something to think about.

For one thing, what about the way we dress? Do we have to be fashionable just to be “in”? In God’s house there is no room for this. Men and women should not be showing off their wares. Our worship is to the glory of God and nothing should distract us from it.

James is not encouraging us to rudeness and disorder. We should show love and respect to all, that many souls may be won for His service. We can and should respect rank and office (confer Brother Wolfgram’s picture in the Chicago paper with the mayor!) but those of high rank and office have no special claim to salvation.

These passages have something to say to the coldness that developer toward strangers in our larger congregations. There is no room for it and no need for it. God is no respecter of persons, and we shouldn’t be either. James continues in the following verses to admonish and offer solutions to congregations and Christians who suffer with these problems.

Verse 4:

Literally: “aren’t you at odds among yourselves and become judges with evil reasoning?”

James uses a rhetorical question which expects an affirmative answer. Those who fulfilled what took place in verses two and three had become judges using the wrong rules by which to judge.

They were using *πονηρον διαλογισμον* (evil reasoning). In making a spiritual judgment they were allowing their sinful nature to form the basis of their judgment. They preferred outward pomp to grace. They

used the standards of money, power and success by which to make their judgments. According to the world this would be acceptable. But how can worldly, that is unjust and corrupt, opinions be used as standards in spiritual judgments?

Application: Faith teaches us not to make these judgments. For through daily contrition and repentance and sanctified Christian lives, we rid ourselves of worldly opinion. They do creep in through our Old Adam, attempting to convince us that one soul is worth more than another. But if we would sit down and trace our partiality to our hidden thoughts we would find them to be exceedingly evil. These evil thoughts are giving us a mind that is partial.

Verse 5

Literally: “Listen, my dear brothers, did not God choose the poor in the world (to be) rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which he promised to those that love him?”

Again James expects an affirmative answer. He is driving home the point that love is a fruit of faith and they should deal with all people that way. They hadn't, as we will see in verse 6.

God didn't choose the poor to be poor. They are poor in regard to the world (dat. of interest or respect). Their wealth is in their heavenly Kingdom. Grace made them rich in faith. Faith which gave them the Kingdom.

Jesus' very own disciples had the same problem as these Jewish Christians to whom James is writing. Recall how they didn't want Jesus to associate with poor folk or adulterers. It was Pentecost before they finally realized that the Gospel was for all.-it in faith.

The poor have so much to gain by the Gospel, because it offers so much to them. cf. Matt. 11:5,6. But it also makes demands on the rich. Love, share and give, tend to hinder rich people from accepting Christ. The love of money has taken its toll. The rich still have to hear the Gospel and it's our job to get it to them. But we are not to treat them any differently from those of lesser means.

Application: James is again reminding us that every one's soul is important. The rich or the poor, both through faith can inherit eternity. Partiality corrupts this fact. In the world's eyes Christians are poor, yet, in God's eyes they are rich. Rich because through faith in Jesus Christ we inherit eternal life. This is why “God's grace is sufficient for us” and we don't need the riches of this world.

Verse 6:

Literally: “But you dishonor the poor. Is it not the rich oppressing you, and dragging you into court?”

Showing favoritism or partiality in spiritual matters is sin. James doesn't mince his words. By catering to the rich, we dishonor the poor. We sin against them by breaking the Eighth Commandment. James again expects an affirmative answer to his question by using οὐχ.

James is still referring back to verse three. ἔλκουσιν means violent treatment (cf. Acts 16:19; 21:30). These Jewish Christians felt the pressure from their Jewish overlords. Apparently, the Romans allowed the Jews of the Diaspora much freedom in the legal matters over their own people. We can see this from Acts 9 where Saul went to Damascus to arrest Christian Jews.

The rich also persecuted the Church by using many different reasons for taking (dragging) people to court. In this way they oppressed these Jewish Christians. James is wondering out loud how these Jews can still give the rich honor. He is saying to them that the rich have never treated them worthy of the respect which his readers are giving to them.

Application: In the same way, we, by showing partiality to some in the congregation are dishonoring others. We too must repent of this sin and avoid it. I'm not advocating that we lock ourselves in our parsonages Sunday noon and not come out until the following Sunday morning. We can have friends. The sin involved is showing partiality. The more friendly we get with someone, the easier it is to be partial.

This is why we have conferences: So that the brethren can get together for fellowship as well as our continuing education. These passages hit home for the writer of this paper since he is a three hour drive to his closest neighbor. Since this is the case, it is easier to cultivate friendships within the congregation. Friendships which could dishonor others. By the grace of God I pray this doesn't happen. Perhaps there could be more fellowship at our conferences?!

Verse 7:

Literally: "Are not those the same who defame the good name, the one called upon you?"

James continues the admonition by reminding his readers that the rich not only oppress and drag them into court, but they also defame their noble name.

What is that noble name? It has to be "Christian." Acts 11:26 tells us, ". . . And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." I Peter 4:14 urges, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified." βλασφημοῦσιν means to speak evil. This is a worldly characteristic. James asks, "How can you give honor and respect to someone who speaks evil of you and at the same time Christ?" While you are in the world don't be a part of it

επικαλεῖσθαι (called upon) is the word used when a woman takes her husband's name at their marriage or the family name a child takes at birth. By faith Christians take Christ's name. The rich, however, blaspheme, speak evil of this name.

Again keep in mind James is not saying that rich people can't and aren't good Christians. It is the love of money that makes them worldly people that oppress and blaspheme the name of Christ.

Application: Today also we still have rich who slander the noble name of Christ. They feel that with their riches they can buy their way into the Church by using their money and influence. By showing partiality to them, we are allowing them to speak evil of the name which we have taken as our own. By doing so we are just as guilty of sin as they are! James confirms this fact in 8-13.

Verse 8:

Literally: "However if you carry out the royal law according to Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well;"

τελειτε - fulfill, bring to completion, carry out. When people become Christians they want to manifest the love of God by loving their fellowman. This fulfills the law.

The royal law is in reference to the law that is fit to guide a King. It is sovereign over all other laws. James no doubt has Matt 22:40 in mind, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (These two are loving the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself.)

James is here commending his readers for showing love and respect to that rich man who visits their services. That is pleasing to God for it is as Scripture has told them to act.

But Scripture says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It doesn't say just your rich neighbor. James is encouraging them to love all men as their neighbors, as Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan. If they would love all men as their neighbors, they would make no distinction between rich and poor. They wouldn't be looking at clothing, wealth and power. They wouldn't give one the best seat in the house and tell the other to sit on the floor. Their conduct would be pleasing to God.

Application: Again it is easy for pastors and his members to judge someone by outward appearance. James tells us don't let it happen. Judge by the value of the soul. Don't use external, worldly opinions (wealth, dress and power) as the standards for judging. But use Scripture which says, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Verse 9:

Literally: “but if you show partiality, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as a transgressor.”

James very bluntly tells his readers that by showing partiality (V3) they are sinning against the royal law which they feel they have been fulfilling. What those Jewish Christians thought to be a trifling fault was a serious sin.

They committed sin because the law convicted them. Deuteronomy 1:17 says, “Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man, for the judgment is God’s: and the cause that is too hard for you bring it unto me and I will hear it.” The law recorded here in Deuteronomy convicted them of partiality. They were considered a transgressor. παραβατης is one who steps across a well-defined line. God’s royal law is the well-defined line and by showing partiality in spiritual matters, they had stepped over that well-defined line. The law forbids it to happen, so therefore don’t do it or you sin!

Application: Partiality is sin. As pastors we must treat it no differently than murder, adultery, covetousness or stealing. Those that transgress need a preaching of the law and an encouragement to contrition and repentance.

Verse 10:

Literally: “For whoever keeps the whole law, but stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”

τηρησῃ - means to keep in the sense of guard or observe.

πτωσῃ - means to stumble or trip.

Apparently James’ readers were justifying their actions saying that they were loving their neighbor, in accordance with Scripture, by respecting the rich man. James says fine: But, then also show the same love to the poor or else you are breaking the law. They will not be excused in some matters because of their obedience in others.

To be law abiding means to abide by all the laws even the ones that are disliked. For if we transgress one we are guilty of all. Lenski uses a valuable illustration. He says if a piece of glass is struck in one point, the entire piece shatters. So it is with the Law. Break only one and we are guilty of all!

Application: Today it has become very popular to categorize sins. Adultery is worse than gossip. Murder is worse than coveting. Doing 59 on the highway is better than 62. James refutes this notion. Sin is sin. No matter how insignificant something is in comparison to another, it is still sin. It makes us guilty of breaking God’s law.

James here also shoots down the false doctrine of work-righteousness. The only way to be free of sin is to keep the law perfectly and in its entirety. If we offend it in the slightest, tiniest little way, we are guilty of all.

Thank God that He sent Jesus to fulfill the Law in its entirety for us: (cf. Sermon on Mount, Matt. 5:18-20)

Verse 11:

Literally: “For the one saying, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder,’ now if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”

James carries the transgression of the law in one point a step farther. The Lawgiver spoke both prohibitions (μη + aorist subjunctive.) If the law has been transgressed, God is just and He will punish by one law, namely, “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” To transgress reveals that one has not been true to the law. Paul

wrote to the Galatians, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” The penalty, the curse, will be administered whichever is violated!

Verse 12:

Literally: “Therefore speak and also act as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom.”

Both imperative (*λαλειτε* and *ποιειτε*) want the exhortation which follows to be habit forming. (“Keep on speaking, keep on acting.”)

The next question is, “What is meant by the law of freedom?” Is it the Ten Commandments? Definitely not: For the law only binds and does not grant freedom. It refers back to 1:21, “the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.” People who accept this Word in faith will be judged by that Word. James is setting the stage here for what follows in verses 14-26.

James is indirectly urging his readers to repentance. Always aware of the many times his people stumbled, he continually urges them to repentance which will liberate them from all guilt. This he wants to be evident in their speech and in their actions. Since they are Christians, they live with Christ, in Christ and submit themselves to His will. James urges that this be evident in their lives *always*, for this is how they will be judged on Judgment Day. “For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.” Matt. 16:27 (also confer Matt. 25:34-40)

Application: James-gives us as pastors a fine example of following the law with the comfort of the Gospel. We too must urge our own flocks to keep on speaking and acting according to the Word which sets us free. Christians govern their lives by love. “We love Him because He first loved us.” Then let our words of love be backed up by deeds of love: This we can apply to all walks of the ministry, the sermonizing, the counseling and the discipline cases.

His love then should also urge us and our people to daily contrition and repentance. Then all of us and all of ours will be ready and waiting for Judgment Day!

Verse 13:

Literally: “For the judging without mercy (will be) to the one not showing mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”

ελεος, mercy is pity for those in distress. This principle was taught by Jesus and will be used at the final Judgment. In Matt. 25:41-45 Jesus talks to those who saw Him starving, thirsty and naked and judges them on their failure to exercise mercy. James is teaching the same thing. His readers didn’t exercise mercy to the poor man. Where was their faith and love? Mercy is produced in the heart by the grace of God, and is an evidence of true faith. No judgment can condemn this faith: This faith. Jesus will acknowledge on Judgment Day. Those who by faith have shown mercy during their earthly lives will be shown mercy by God on the last day.

The opposite is also true: Those who deny mercy during their lives will be denied it at the second Judgment.

κατακαυχεται means triumph over, boast, exult over. Mercy triumphs over the judgment. Judgment demands condemnation - mercy pleads for salvation. Mercy wins: The divine justice of God isn’t disregarded. The Redeemer, Jesus Christ, has met all of its demands with His holy life and His innocent suffering and death.

This mercy that exults over judgment is not legalistic. Matthew tells us, “Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.” It is a promise and blessing of our All Merciful God.

Application: James, at the close of the first section of chapter two, makes an earnest plea to all Christians to show love and mercy in the same way that God has shown love and mercy to the human race. Pastors need keep this ever before them. We must be prime examples of love and mercy to our congregations.

Always willing to listen to *all*, even those that “attack” us and give us ulcers. For as Matthew said, “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?”

May God grant that our faith and the faith of all Christians. be prompted by God’s mercy to always speak and act as those full of the Word of Life.

II. Avoid an Inactive Faith 14-26.

Verse 14:

Literally: “What good does it do, my brothers, if a man says that he has faith but he does not have works? Is that faith able to save him?”

James begins his section on avoiding inactive faith with a rhetorical question which expects a negative answer. The people to whom James is writing obviously had problems with subjective justification or faith. They felt that good works were not necessary, providing they maintained the basic beliefs of Christianity. James asks them if their definition of faith is saving faith. The answer is an absolute, no!

The basis for this entire section (14-26) is Matt. 7:16-20 (by their fruits you shall know them.) Faith cannot be seen. It is in the heart. Therefore, works manifest that faith. Faith that is fruitful is saving faith. Faith that is not fruitful is a sham. It is worthless. It doesn’t profit anything. James in no uncertain terms expresses to his readers that faith without works is a delusion.

Application: Every congregation has nominal members. They want to have their name on a church roster, but refuse to serve, give or even attend unless it is convenient. (Christmas and Easter:) However, when approached regarding their unfaithfulness, they are very willing to make a confession of faith. But they feel that belief is all that is needed. We *must* warn them, on the basis of James’ words, that their faith really isn’t saving faith.

Verses 15-16:

Literally: “If a brother or sister are poorly dressed and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go home in peace, keep your selves warm-and feed yourselves,’ but do not give to them the necessities of the body, what good does it do?”

James by saying “brother or sister” is indicating one who is close to his readers. Whether or not it is an actual family relationship or some brother or sister in faith, we aren’t told. And it doesn’t matter, for the point is still the same:

γυμνοὶ doesn’t necessarily have to mean bare naked. Here I take it to mean without sufficient clothing, hence “poorly dressed.” I think anyone would give a naked person something to wear. But, when someone is lacking sufficient clothing the test of faith is quite different, as James proves:

χορταζω (feed) was originally used for the pasturing of cattle. James uses it to bluntly illustrate what was being done. Those that were in need were told to go find their own food and their own warmth. That brother or sister did not want good wishes and kind words. They wanted and were in need of the acts of love which these kind words prompted. They instead got empty words to fend for them selves.

Application: True Christianity doesn’t want a mere profession of faith. It wants action: Faith was designed by its Creator for a holy life. Jesus helped the destitute! He fed 5,000 at one sitting: Shouldn’t we, as those following His example, culture this love in our congregations

How many of us don’t get calls or taps on our door for handouts? If our congregation doesn’t have a poor and needy fund, maybe it should start one: Anyway, if we can’t give them cash, we can give them advice on where to get some help and/or a lift. The need for caution must also be noted. If they are given money, let’s

be sure it is going for food and not to support their habit! If they claim their booze is for warmth, give them an old blanket!

Verse 17:

Literally: "Therefore faith, if it doesn't have works, is dead in itself."

James is talking about subjective justification here. Faith which is a trust in God. Faith that embraces Christ and shows itself in good works. James isn't saying that good works are the life line of faith. A dead branch on a tree shows that it is dead by not producing leaves or fruit. That is how man knows when to cut it down. Faith is the same way: Faith that does not manifest itself in good works is dead, καθ' ἑαυτην, in itself. It is both inwardly and outwardly dead.

The Roman Catholics use this passage 'as proof of their doctrine of work-righteousness. First of all they take it out of context because James isn't even talking about works of the law. They feel that faith is an assent of the will plus good works. They deny faith as trust in God and they condemn those who believe it!

Faith is knowledge (Rom. 10:14), assent (John 3:11, 12) and trust (John 3:18). Faith by itself, without good works is unthinkable. That which is alive shows itself. It makes itself visible. That which is dead produces nothing!

Application: It is a cheap and easy religion if people can think that they merely have to confess the articles of faith to be a Christian. Faith without works is a 'definition of a hypocrite. If faith have no works it is cheating the soul, mocking God and the heart is dead to real Godliness. This has to be a main consideration in our sermons, Bible classes, confirmation classes, adult information instruction and in our lives!

Verse 18:

Literally: "But one will say, 'you have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith that does not express itself in works and I will show you faith by my works."

James introduces an objector into the discussion. The argument of this objector is that one has faith, another has works; both have true religion. James points out that the two go together. You can't have one without the other. James isn't discussing faith or works. He is looking for proof of real faith. Not works as a means of salvation, but works as proof of faith.

James talks as if he were from Missouri, "Show me!" He says to the objector, "I can show you faith by my works." His works proved that his faith was active. But can the objector show faith without works? James knew what Matthew had said in the seventh chapter, "Ye shall know them by their fruits."

Application: The people of our congregations have many Sunday alternatives posed by this world. They think they can listen to these worldly alternatives because they have made a confession of faith. "I believe, therefore I am saved." It is our duty to warn them that true faith is active. If it isn't they are in danger of losing it, providing it isn't gone already!

Verse 19:

Literally: "You believe that there is one God, you do well; but the demons believe and also shudder."

James continues his argument against those who feel creed is enough. To believe that God exists is fundamental doctrine, but it is not trust. Knowing that there is a Supreme Being is basic knowledge, but it is not saving faith. It is good to have this knowledge (you do well). It's a start but that is as far as it goes. Why even the demons go that far and they never doubt it! They do more than believe, they shudder at it!

φρισσοουσιν means to bristle up, shudder, the hair standing on end with terror.

People can have dead faith, for even demons do! To say, “I believe in God the Father Almighty” and use that as our profession of faith won’t even distinguish us from demons.

Application: These people who claim to have faith but don’t show it by their works are the toughest kind to deal with. If they would deny Christ, we could just call them unbelievers. But leaning on the fence as they are trying to do, has to be bought to their attention. You are either for Him or against Him. James very ably tells us what to say. “Even the demons go as far as you, but they shudder at it!” Unless we gladly give ourselves to God, as the Gospel urges us, to love Him, to delight in Him, to serve Him; this proves we have true faith. The demons cannot and will not do this! By making a mere profession, these people are building up false hope. This is what we must combat!

Verse 20:

Literally: “But do you wish to come to know, O empty man, that faith which does not express itself in works is useless?”

κενέ means empty or deficient. This man, the objector from verse 18, is empty, deficient of good works, but yet, a boaster of faith. James calls him empty, foolish, senseless: He is senseless because he doesn’t realize that faith is trust (*fīducia*, confidence of the heart). Faith that is alive and moves the heart to good works.

αργη means useless. In contrast to verse 19 where faith was dead, here it is useless. Not two separate thoughts: but a natural progression in thought. Something that is dead is useless: Faith that is dead is useless in the matter of salvation.

Application: Although it seems rather severe and harsh to call a church member a senseless, deficient person, this plain language has to be used to make these people realize their error. Faith that is useless is like a pen with no ink! We must urge our people to faith that lives!

Verse 21:

Literally: “Was not Abraham, our father, declared righteous by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?”

James asks the question which expects an affirmative answer. His readers, Jewish Christians, knew who he was talking about when the example of Abraham was mentioned. This was their ancestry. These Jewish Christians were inclined to evade good works and rely on dead faith. James says, “look at our ancestor Abraham.” “His good work of sacrificing his son Isaac was evidence of the justifying faith that was living in his heart.”

This passage has caused much grief to many serious Bible students. After reading what Paul says to the Romans, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall be no flesh justified in his sight.” Again, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” To the Galatians Paul wrote, “... 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.”

Then James comes along and says, “Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works ...” and, “you see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” How can these two completely opposite thoughts be reconciled? Very easily!

Paul’s main question is, “How may a sinner be justified?” Paul is always talking about objective justification, that which God declares. James is speaking about subjective justification or faith and the relationship of a Christian’s sanctification to that faith. Paul is talking works of the law ... James, works done out of faith. Both use Abraham as an example. Paul, however, uses it as an example of the forensic act of justification which took place before his circumcision. James uses Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, which took place approximately twenty years later, as proof of the saving faith that was alive in Abraham’s heart. They

aren't at odds; they agree! Paul even teaches good works. To the Ephesians he writes, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." To Titus he wrote, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." They both agree on objective and subjective justification and the life of sanctification which flows from our justification.

Application: The good works that are performed by Christians are evidence to others that saving faith is living within the soul. "Ye shall know them by their fruit." We see someone living in faith, performing good works and we conclude that that soul is justified. The good works have shown us the living faith. This is the correct standard on which to judge in spiritual matters of spiritual life!

Verse 22:

Literally: "You see, that faith was working with his works and faith was perfected by the works."

βλεπεις - "The point is so clear you have to see it."

συνηργει means cooperate, work together with. Abraham's faith was active in his works. His faith brought about his works.

Some believe today that this should be rendered as "Cooperated." This notion has to be false. In a cooperation of two sides, each side has to be able to stand alone. Good works cannot do this. They flow out of true faith. Without true faith they are as "stinking rags."

ετελειωθη means to carry to an end, perfect. This isn't to say that Abraham's faith was imperfect or incomplete. His faith received its final and definite proof by his good works. His goal is in verse 23.

Verse 23:

Literally: "and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'But Abraham believed in God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness,' and he was called a friend of God."

Good works don't earn salvation: They prove that true saving faith exists in the soul. Where you find faith, you find good works. James here agrees with Paul that Abraham was justified by faith, but he adds that his example of good works, the sacrifice of Isaac, proved beyond all doubt that he had justifying, that is, saving faith.

For this reason Abraham is called a friend of God. This is an honorable title, but it will only be applied to those with true faith and willing obedience.

Application: Our good works perfect our faith. They are our final proof of saving faith in our souls. We too can look forward to the same goal as Abraham: We too will enjoy eternal righteousness through saving faith manifested by our good works. Then we too will be called "friends" of God.

Verse 24:

Literally: "You recognize that man is declared righteous by works and not by faith alone."

The ground for justification in God's eyes is faith in Jesus Christ. The evidence of that saving faith is good works. Again, they are proof of true faith. James here is not referring to God's forensic act of justification. He is discussing the proof of faith, that being good works. In man's eyes we can consider someone righteous when we observe their good works. We see their good works; which show us true faith; which means saving faith is living in that soul. We therefore conclude: that man is justified!

Application: Faith, live faith, is what we all must have, only to be true it must show itself in good works. As Christians we should copy Abraham's example and then God will bestow upon us Abraham's blessings. The eternal promise and blessing of life eternal is ours through a living faith!

Verse 25:

Literally: "In the same way also, was not Rahab, the prostitute, declared righteous by works, entertaining the messengers as guests and then sending them away by another way?"

James uses another Scriptural example to drive home his point. He doesn't go into details for his readers already knew them: Rahab had heard of the promises of God to Abraham. She heard the Word of God. It wasn't an isolated message. We have her confession of faith in Joshua 2:9-11. She is even named among the ancestry of Jesus in Matt. 1:5. Be that as it may, her works of receiving the spies, protecting them and hurrying them on their way proved that her saving faith was alive in her heart and soul.

Application: Rahab, the prostitute, is used as an example of saving faith. God's grace had turned her around from her former way of life to that of a converted child of God. In dealing with our people let us also forget about their past (providing it has been repented of) and let us commend them for their lives of faith.

Verse 26:

Literally: "For just as the body separated from the soul is dead, so also faith that does not express itself in works is dead."

James concludes with a brief summary of verses 14-26. A problem that many commentators had, as well as translations, was how to render πνεύμα. Some say "breath," some say "soul" or "spirit." I feel either gives the same thought. A body without breath is just as dead as a body without a spirit! James is here comparing a physical dead thing to a spiritual dead thing.

A dead body has all the appearances of being alive. It has all the members seemingly ready to go. But without (breath, soul) none of those members can function.

So it is with faith. If there is genuine faith, it will be accompanied by good works. If good works are missing, the faith is dead. Absence proves deadness!

Application: Paul wrote to Titus, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men." This verse of inspired Scripture should always be in front of us and our people. Preaching justification and commending them to apply that doctrine to their hearts, that God-pleasing sanctification follow. Because then, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only!"

An Evaluation of Translations

NASB: I had no questions or problems with their rendering of the Greek.

BECK: (His old translation - his recent translation was not to be found in all of Louisville, possibly all of Kentucky.)

Basically, the entire chapter was free and loose from the Greek. I would especially have to question the translations of δικαιωω in verses 21, 24 and 25 as “get to be righteous.” The declaratory act of justification is disregarded.

“Get to be righteous” leaves too much room for work-righteousness, and/or a long drawn out process of justification much like the initiation process at NWC.

NIV: Very easy to read, though at times somewhat free with the Greek text.

Vocables

1.	προσωπολημψια εχετε	pres. act. inv.	εχω	partiality hold
2.	εισελθη χρυσοδακτυλιος εσθης λαμπρος ρυπαρος	2 aor. alt. subj.	εισερχομαι	come into with a gold ring on one's finger clothing bright, shining dirty
3.	επιβλεψητε φορουντα ειπητε καθου στηθι υποποδιον	1 aor. act. subj. pres. act. part. 2 aor. act. subj. pres. mid. inv. 2 aor. act. inv.	επιβλεπω φορεω ειπον καθεμαι ιστημι	look at, care about. wear, bear constantly say sit to place footstool
4.	διεκριθητε εγενεσθε διαλογισμος πονηρος	1 aor. pass. ind. 2 aor. mid. ind.	διακρινω γινομαι	be at odds, doubt, waiver become reasoning wicked, evil, bad.
5.	ακουσατε εξελεξατο επηγγειλατο αγαπωσιν	aor. inv. act. aor. mid. ind. aor. mid. ind. pres. part. masc. dat. pl.	ακουω εκλεγω επαγγελλομαι αγαπαω	hear, listen choose promise love
6.	ητιμασατε καταδυναστευουσιν κριτηριον	aor. act. ind. pres. act. ind.	ατιμαζω καταδυναστενω	dishonor oppress, exploit law-court, court, place where judgment given
7.	βλασφημουσιν επικληθεν	pres. act. ind. aor. pass. part.	βλασφημεω επικαλεω	injure reputation of, defame name, give a name

8.	τελειτε βασιλικον αγαπησεις ποιειτε	pres. act. ind. fut. ind. pres. ind.	τελεω αγαπαω ποιεω	fulfill, carry out royal, regal love do
9.	προσωπολημπτειτε εργαζεσθε ελεγχομενοι παραβατης	pres. act. ind. pres. ind. pres. pass. part.	προσοπολημπτεω εργαζομαι ελεγχω	show partiality commit convict (by proof of guilt) transgressor
10.	τηρηση πταιση γεγονεν ενοχος	aor. act. subs. aor. act. subs. 2nd perf. ind.	τηρεω πταιω γινομαι	keep, observe stumble, trip become guilty
11.	ειπων μοιχευσης φονευεις γεγονας	Nom. sg. masc. part. aor.act. subs. aor. act. subs. perf. ind.	ειπων μοιχευω φονευω γινομαι	say commit adultery murder become
12.	λαλειτε ελευθερια μελλοντες κρισεσθαι	pres. act. imv. nom. pl. masc. pres. part. pres. pass. inf.	λαλεω μελλω κρινω	speak freedom, liberty are denotes action that follows divine decree judge
13.	κρισιν αναλεος ποιησαντι ελεος κατακαυχεται κρισεως	 dat. sq. masc. aor. part. pres. mid. ind.	ποιεω κατακαυχαομαι	judging without mercy do mercy triumphs over judgment
14.	λεγη εχειν εχη δυναται σωζαι	pres. act. subs. pres. act. inf. pres. act. subs. pres. ind. aor. act. inf.	λεγω εχω εχω δυναμαι σωζω	say have have am able, I can save
15.	γυμνος υπαρχωσιν λειπομενοι τροφη	pres. act. subs. pres. pass part.	υπαρχω λειπω	poorly dressed to exist, to be do without, be in need of, lack food
16.	ειπη υπαγετε θερμαινεσθε χορταζεσθε	2 aor. act. subs. pres. act. imv. pres. imv, mid. pres. imv. mid.	ειπον υπαγω θερμαινω χορταζω	say go, go home keep warm to feed

	δωτε	2 aor act. subs.	διδωμι	to give
17.	εχη	pres. act. subs.	εχω	have
18.	ερει διξον δειξω χωρις	fut. act. aor. act. inv.	ειρον δεικνυμι fut. act. ind.	say show, prove, explain δεικνυμι show, prove, explain. without expressing (A-G, page 899 CHORIS BB.)
19.	πιστευεις δαιμονια	pres. act. ind.	πιστευω	believe demon
20.	θελεις γνωσαι κενε αργη	pres. act, ind. aor. act. inf.	θελω γνωσκω	wish come to know foolish, senseless useless, barren
21.	εδικαιωθη ανενεγκας θυσιαστηριον	aor. pass. ind. 2 aor. act. part.	δικαιοω αωαφερω	declare righteous offer up altar
22.	βλεπεις συνηργει ετελειωθη	pres. act. ind. imperfect act. aor. pass. ind.	βλεπω συνεργεω τελειωω	to see work with make perfect
23.	επληρωθη λεγουσα ελογισθη εκληθη	aor. pass. ind. nom. fem. pres, act. part. aor. pass. ind. aor. pass. ind.	πληροω λεγω λογιζομαι καλεω	fulfill to say reckon, count call, designate as
24.	ορατε δικαιουται	pres. act. ind. pres. pass ind.	οραω δικαιοω	see, recognize declare righteous
25.	πορνη εδικαιωθη υποδεξαμενη εκβαλουσα	aor. pass. ind. aor. mid. part. 2 aor. act. part.	δικαιοω υποδεχομαι εκβαλλω	prostitute, harlot. declare righteous receive, welcome, entertain as a guest send away
26.	χωρις πνευμα χωρις			separated, apart from breath, spirit (that which gives life to the body.) does not express itself

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