

Faith Without Works

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[0 : 00] As we come then to this second chapter in the letter of James, this is a chapter with one theme, although you could say it's in two halves. It's like if you take an apple and you chop it down the middle, you've still got two perfect halves of an apple, but it's still an apple on both sides.

And James is concerned here with the putting of faith into practice. That is the theme of this second chapter here, the putting of faith into practice.

See, sometimes people have contrasted, erroneously, have contrasted the teaching of Paul with justification by faith and this letter of James as though he was saying, oh, justification by works, as though the two were at loggerheads with each other.

But we find repeatedly through the letter of James, similarity after similarity after similarity, so many points of contact between what James teaches and what Paul teaches, that it is impossible to think a dichotomy between the two of them, as though they are teaching opposite things.

Rather, they are looking at the same theme from different angles. Paul is coming at this same gospel truth from the idea that people had that you did good works, you did things that were acceptable in God's sight, and so you earned merit.

[1 : 22] And the same idea pervaded throughout the medieval church in this day of Christianity. And like what at the Reformation, this truth of justification by faith was rediscovered, so what Paul is teaching in his letters is the same gospel truth, that it's not about things we have done which earn merit with the Lord.

They don't. All our righteousness is in his filthy rags, as Isaiah tells us, you know, without faith it is impossible to please him. But what James is saying, coming from the other side is, it's no use to say, yeah, fine, I've got faith, yeah, I assent to that particular truth intellectually.

If somebody says, well, you've got to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, I say, well, yeah, okay, fine, I accept that, I agree with that, that's me done, okay, I'm a Christian, I'm already one foot in heaven, okay, I can go off and live how I like.

No, James is saying that if you have faith, it has to be put into practice. It has to be lived out if it is going to be a living faith.

And the first example he gives is that if you have real faith before God, then you've got to love your fellow men and women, and you've got to recognize that each as a soul redeemed or in need of redemption by Christ.

[2 : 40] You don't apply the standards of the world to people whose souls are of equal value, but whose outward appearance or bodily wealth might be different.

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. Now, even in this first verse here, we've got a particular case being made.

Remember that when Jesus was born and when he was brought into the temple, Simeon, old Simeon, who had been promised that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, the Messiah, in Luke chapter 2 at verse 32, Simeon, by inspiration of the Lord, taking the child, the baby Jesus in his arms, and describes him, amongst other things, as a light to lighten the Gentiles, that is the non-Jewish nations, and at the same time being the glory of thy people Israel. The Messiah is the glory of Israel, the fulfillment of all that Israel has existed for, just as the butterfly is the glory of the little sort of bug or maggot that it was beforehand, the little chrysalis that it spun for itself, and then come out of it, the butterfly is the glory of the little cocoon that was there before. So Christ is the glory of Israel. He is the Lord of glory. Or as the original wouldn't have the words, the Lord, that's been added later by the translators to help us understand.

[4 : 16] So we read literally, Our Lord Jesus Christ of glory, with respect of persons. If we consider how great Christ is, the glory that he occupies in heaven, the glory that he is of Israel, and then you

look down at the difference between somebody with a silk robe, or a silk clothes, and a gold ring, or against somebody who's in rags.

You know, as far as God's glory is concerned, these differences are like nothing. You know, it is said of one of the 19th century kings in this country that it was remarkable that he treated dukes and vikants and others just the same as he did the woodcutter or the peasant.

And, you know, he would speak to them with the same kind of respect and the same kind of almost equality, and he'd have the same kind of reverence almost for them.

And he got alongside on people marveled at this. And only those who were very close to him realised that he had such a sense of the majesty and the kingship which he occupied, that anybody who wasn't royal, anybody who wasn't a king or a prince or a queen on his level, they were all commoners to him.

You know, whether they were dukes or vikants or woodcutters or peasants or serfs, they were all down there. So he spoke to the duke the same way as he spoke to the peasant, and to him they were all just much of a muchness because they weren't kings.

[5 : 40] Now you could say, Oh, what a snob. Oh, what a terrible guy. I think he's so elevated in that way. But it's a good thing that he treats everyone the same. And it is likewise God in his glory is so high above us that all the things that we think, Well, you're rich, but you're not so rich.

And you've got better clothing than you. And you're more important than you. And so, no, not in God's eyes. These are souls in need of redemption. These are souls thirsty for the gospel, hungry for the bread of life.

If you lifted up a rock and underneath were a whole bunch of scurrying ants, you would say, Oh, look, that one's so much bigger and stronger than the others. That must be a special ant.

That must be a much more important ant than that one. That one over there, it's just weak and black and not scurrying very fast. It's all just ants under a big stone, as far as you're concerned.

And our differences of wealth or power or difference, they mean nothing to God. So, in fact, they're almost worse. They're almost against us.

[6 : 46] Because when James says, Look, you can't distinguish in this way. If they're coming to your assembly, the word for assembly is literally synagogue. Remember that he is writing to Jews, Jewish Christians.

If they're coming to your synagogue, into your assembly, a man with a gold ring and goodly apparel, they're coming also a poor man in vile raiment. And you have respect to him that wear the gay clothing. Oh, sit here.

Oh, the other one, you sit down there, or stand there, or on the mic footstool. Are you not then partial? You're judging in yourselves and become judges of evil thoughts. Now, in the original Greek, the word that we have translated as partial, it's very similar to the word for judge.

It's the same word from which we get the word critic. One who is judging. You are being a judge in yourselves, a judge of evil thoughts. You're judging partially.

You're biased towards evil. Listen, 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 them?

[7 : 49] Now, isn't this what Jesus said? Good news to the poor. The poor because they have nothing else. The poor most readily believe the gospel, whereas the rich, they have a lot to lose.

Oh, remember the rich young ruler that went sadly away when Jesus said, you know, celebrate and you've got to follow me. And he went away sad because he had a lot to lose. But the common people heard him gladly.

And still throughout the world, you'll find whether it's in India or Pakistan or Nigeria or whatever it happens to be, it is often the poor who receive most readily the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And this becomes a means of scorn to others. You know, in India, for example, it was the so-called untouchables, the Dalit peoples, who readily responded to the gospel because in Hindu society, they were the lowest of the law.

But in the gospel, they were equal with everybody else. This was good news to them. And so, don't you recognize it? You despise the poor. Do not rich men oppress you and draw you before the judgment seats?

[8 : 54] Do they not blaspheme that worthy name by which you're called? Now remember what Paul says. Similarities between Paul and James. 1 Corinthians 1, verse 26.

You see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. And God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen. Yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. Exactly what James is saying here. No flesh should glory in his presence. You despise the poor. You're at fault. Rich men, they're the ones that blaspheme in the name of Jesus because they think they're above him.

They think they're stronger than this gospel. They shake their fist at heaven and think they don't have to listen to God. They blaspheme the worthy name. They're the ones that drag you before the judgment seats because it is the rich who can afford to go to law.

[10:01] It is the rich who can afford to hire the hot lawyers and to oppress those who may offend them. The poor have no lawyers in that sense. Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by which you're called.

If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, regardless of who he or she is, you do well.

But if you have respect to persons, outward persons, you commit, that is you work, sin, and are convinced, convicted of the law as transgressors.

You know, but the royal law, you love your neighbor as yourself, this is just as important as all the other aspects of the law, like, you know, you wouldn't commit adultery, you wouldn't kill, and so on, as he says here.

Now remember again, this focus upon law because James is writing to Jewish people. Although they are now believers in Christ, although they are fulfilled in Christ, the glory of his people Israel, the law is very much part of their psyche.

[11:08] It's part of their background, their culture, their heritage. They have been brought up to believe the law, to honor the law. And so they see Christ, yes, as the fulfillment of the law, but yeah, they try and keep it themselves as well.

Not as an instead of, but as a means of honoring the law. James says, well, that's fine. If you fulfill the royal law, love your neighbor as yourself, that's good. But if you fall down in that respect of loving your neighbor and loving him equally, whether he's rich or poor, then you're guilty of a breach in the law.

Now we've said many times in the past, haven't we, that the law is not concerned with how good you are at keeping it. You go and steal something from a shop, and when the policeman catches you, he's not going to say, well, you know, you're actually not bad because you're not a drug dealer and you're not a murderer.

You're not a kidnapper. You're not a rapist. You're not a human trafficker. You know, but yeah, okay, you have done this bit of shoplifting, but when you set that against all the things you haven't done, well, you're not really that bad.

No, he's not going to do that. He is only concerned, not with how good a person you've been all the other 99% of your life. He's concerned with that breach of the law. You'll be condemned and convicted for the bad that you have done.

[12:24] That is what the law is about. Just as if you're caught for speeding, it doesn't mean, you know, they're not going to say, well, there are thousands of times you drove down this road and you didn't speed. We're going to take that into consideration.

No, they're not. If you break the law, you'll be convicted as a law breaker. And if you break it in one thing, then you'll have a record. It won't throw into the record all the other good things you've done. It'll only throw in the bad thing, the one thing you have done. So if it says, do not kill, I say, that's fine, I don't kill, but I do commit adultery. Then you are a law breaker. You say, well, I don't commit adultery and I don't kill and I don't disorder my parents.

That's good. But I fail to love my neighbors myself. Then you're a law breaker. And what James is trying to get into their heads is, this is just as serious as a matter as thou shalt not kill or thou shalt not steal or thou shalt not commit adultery, whatever.

Loving your neighbor as yourself is right up there with all the other commandments. Because this is what Jesus said, the most important commandment of all is, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength.

[13 : 36] This is the first commandment, the most important one of all. And the second is like it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. So it's right up there as the second most important commandment that Jesus taught.

So you break that one, you're guilty of the whole lot of the law. So speak ye and so do as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Now James has already made reference to the law of liberty in chapter 1, verse 25, when he says, Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

You see, the law, God's law, is not now seeking to catch us out. It's not like the policeman waiting for you to speak or arresting you if you're shoplifting or whatever.

It's like a law you try to live out of love because your perfection is already presented at God's throne of grace by what Jesus Christ has done.

[14 : 42] You have already got that freedom, that liberty because of what Christ has done. Everything you're doing now is just response to that love.

It is a law of liberty. And you want to be judged by that, not in terms of like the old law by which people would be judged, but judged in terms of how much love I have shown to the Lord.

Judged by the perfect law of liberty. So speak ye, now he talks about speech in chapter 3. And so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

For he shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy and mercy rejoiced against judgment. Now what does this mean? He hath judgment without mercy that hath shown no mercy. Well, if we show no mercy to others, it means that we understand this to be an okay standard by which to judge people. If I say, well, he's done this to me and I'm not going to forgive him.

[15 : 42] I'm demanding my pound of flesh. I'm demanding my payment back. I am demanding he puts it right and that he goes to prison as well. I'm insisting on my right's judgment without mercy.

So if not showing any mercy, then what we're effectively saying to the Lord is, this is the right way to judge people. This is how I judge people. This is how I expect to be judged.

But in reality, what most of us think is, this is how I'm quite happy to treat other people, but I wouldn't like to be treated that way myself. And we have a double standard.

And we're meant to have the same standard. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Whereas have you with God do unto you. So he'll have judgment without mercy that has shown no mercy.

Now that's really the converse, the other side of the coin from what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. So what's the opposite of that?

[16 : 41] Cursed are the unmerciful, for they shall be shown no mercy because they didn't show any mercy. They didn't believe mercy was a worthy thing for them to do. So it's not worthy for them to do, it's not worthy for them to receive.

He shall have judgment without mercy that has shown no mercy. mercy and mercy rejoices against judgment. Now we've got to be careful with this verse here.

It's not a case of mercy overturns judgment. So forget about justice and righteousness and fulfilling the law. As long as there's mercy, everybody's all happy and easy-ozy and it's just great.

No, it doesn't mean that. It rather means that if we have received God's mercy, then it means we can rejoice at the prospect of the judgment.

We can rejoice at the prospect of, we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and so we shall. We can rejoice in the knowledge our price is paid, our sin is forgiven, we have received mercy and we are content having received mercy to show mercy to everybody else.

[17 : 48] we rejoice for them. We have received mercy and we rejoice ourselves because we have received mercy and when judgment comes, we're not afraid of it. We're not afraid to be judged because we know that when the all-seeing eye of God is turned upon us and pierces to the dividing asunder of body and soul and spirit, what he will see in our place is not me, myself, and my dark black heart and all my sins, he will see the righteousness of Christ in which every redeemed soul is clothed.

He will see that perfect righteousness sinless because of what Christ has done and the price of any sin committed, he will see that paid upon the cross in blood and in the life of his beloved son and so we know that that mercy has been expended for us.

We can rejoice. We can rejoice at the prospect of God. Bring it on. It exalts God with his justice but the mercy overflows the love of God.

Mercy rejoices against judgment. We might say mercy rejoices in the midst of judgment. Might be a more easier way to understand it. But then he's putting it into practice.

He's putting it into illustration again about putting faith into practice. When he's talking about mercy, he's not talking about the absence of being bad to people.

[19 : 19] Remember what he's saying about the poor man coming into the synagogue or into the church gathering or the assembly? You've got to show mercy in practice. It's got to be active mercy.

It's got to be loving mercy. You've got to say, yes, come and sit here beside me. Come and sit in the equal place with the rich man. Come and be one of us. What does it profit, my brethren?

If a man say he has faith and have not works, can faith save him? Of course, we used to let us do the Romans and all the other aspects of the New Testament. Yes, of course, faith can save him because we are justified by faith.

That's exactly what we read in Ephesians. What it means here, it doesn't really come out in the translation, is if a man says his faith but has not worked, in other words, if he doesn't put his faith into practice, can such a faith save him?

A faith that doesn't actually affect his behaviour, a faith that doesn't drive how he looks, that does not inform, guide, and direct his actions in life.

[20 : 24] Can such a faith save him? We would have to say no. We would have to say that unless Christ is Lord of all, he is not Lord at all.

Now this is an extremely relevant point in our present day and age because there are abundant examples of people who would say, yes, of course, I'm a Christian, of course, I believe, but this aspect of my life, whether it's my sexual behaviour or whether it's my personal choice or whatever, that's not effective.

That's reserved to me. I do what I want, never mind what the Bible says, never mind what Jesus would teach, I keep that to myself. this aspect of my life is not up for grabs for God to direct.

If he has a faith that does not affect, direct, and control all of his life, can such a faith save him?

When he is keeping back part in himself, if it isn't put into practice, a faith that is not put into works, if a brother or sister be naked, for example, and destitute of daily food, he says, oh, off you go and preach, depart, be warned, and feel, oh, we wish you well, but you've got the means to help them, but you don't do it.

You don't say, well, here's a spare coat, here's some clothing, here's some food, you know, come in, warm yourself of the fire so you can at least help them for a wee bit. You've got the means to do it, and you don't do it, but you say, oh, off you go, yes, yes, have a nice time, be warned, be fooled, of course, we wish you all the best, but you don't give them to the prophet, what use is that?

[22 : 04] Even so, faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Now, Paul, of course, writes precisely about faith, Galatians chapter 5, verse 6, faith which worketh by love, because of love, faith is put into practice, faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Remember when, then, Jesus, came down from the Mount of Transfiguration, and the disciples were struggling with this boy that was possessed with a devil, and they couldn't chuck out the devil, and they said, afterwards, why couldn't we chuck it out?

He said, oh, faithless generation, how long must I bear with you? And they said, afterwards, why couldn't we cast out this devil? He says, because of your unbelief. Now, the disciples were not devoid of faith, they obviously had faith, but they didn't have enough faith to be able to put it into practice, and because they couldn't put it into practice, it was as though they didn't have any.

That's why he described this faithless, he knew he had some faith. He said, even if faith is a grain of mustard seed, you could save it in this mountain, be cast into the midst of the sea, and it would do it. Faith without works is dead, being alone.

It exists in your head, and it exists in your mind, but it doesn't affect the way you live your life. What kind of faith is that? What kind of use is that? A man may say, thou hast faith, and I who works, show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.

[23 : 35] It doesn't just mean about good deeds that I do, it means the way I live. It means what do I put into practice? How do I show that I belong to Christ?

You know, it's going to say, oh, yeah, okay, I believe that Jesus is the Savior, is the Son of God, and meanwhile, I'll ignore this homeless person or this poor person in the street. I've got money to

help him, but I won't do it.

I'll jump on my Sabbath day, I'll go into the pub, I'll get myself half stoned, I'll go off and commit adultery, but hey, it doesn't matter, because I believe in Christ and I'm saved, so that's me, I can do what I like.

Now, if there is a faith that does not affect how I live, how I work, what use is such a thing? It may be in my head, but it is alone there. It is as good as dead.

Then show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thy believers still as one God, oh, this is what I believe, that's great. The devil even believes that.

[24 : 32] So, he knows the truth about who Christ is. The devil believes in that, but he believes and he trembles. All the devils know who Jesus is. They're terrified of him. What are we to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth, that thou come to destroy us?

Before the time, they know exactly who he is. The Holy One of Israel, they know. That doesn't mean they love him. That doesn't mean they obey him. They believe. The devils also believe and trembles.

So, you say, oh, yeah, well, we've got, yeah, I've got that faith. I accept that and intellectually I accept these things. It doesn't affect how you look. It doesn't affect how you put it into practice. But wilt thou know of a man that faith without works is dead? And likewise, of course, we'd have to say that works without faith is dead. You need both.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered his son Isaac upon the altar?

Now, elsewhere, of course, Paul writes, Abraham was justified by faith.

[25 : 32] Hebrews 11 tells us, you know, by faith, Abraham offered up Isaac and believed that he, that God could raise him from the dead even if he had killed him.

Hebrews 11, verse 70, by faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac and he had received the promises offered up his only begotten son. But without faith, Hebrews 11, such as impossible to please him.

But he that cometh to God must believe that he is and he is a warder of them that diligently seek it. Without faith, all our works, all our righteousnesses, we are all as an unclean thing, Isaiah says.

We all do fade as a leaf by our iniquities like the wind have taken us away. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. There's none that calleth upon thy name without faith and he cannot please him.

But likewise, unless the faith be put into practice, it would be no use Abram saying, Lord, of course I believe in you. I know you're the true God. You gave me my beloved son, Isaac.

[26 : 33] I waited 25 years for Isaac and now here he is, the apple of my eye, my heir. And here he is. And now, you're asking me to offer him up on the altar?

To kill him? In other words? That can't be right. No, no, Lord, that can't be so. Of course I believe in you. Of course I know you, but don't ask me to do this. No, I can't possibly do this.

This cannot possibly be God's will. God tested Abraham. He tried him, not because he wanted to tempt him with evil, but he wanted to distinguish between who does Abraham love most in all the world.

Oh, he's got his Isaac that he had waited for so long. But if it comes to a choice between Isaac or the Lord, who will Abraham obey?

And this is what we did. Our father, Abraham was justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works and by works was faith made perfect.

[27 : 41] perfect. Now you see, this is what we read in chapter 1, verse 4, that patience have a perfect work that he may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

It is completed. His faith is put into practice. It is made whole, made perfect. The scripture was fulfilled, which said, Abraham believed God and it was imputed unto him for righteousness and he was called the friend of God.

Isaiah 41, verse 8, thou Israel art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend, who is called the friend of God.

Genesis 15, verse 6, tells us, Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now, of course, we have to recognize that Paul says in Romans 14, verse 22, hast thou faith?

Have it to thyself before God. In other words, keep it to yourself. Now, James appears to be saying something different but what's the context of what Paul is saying there in Romans 14?

[28 : 44] When he says, hast thou faith? Have it to thyself. He means, don't be judging others because of what you think or you believe. You concentrate on being like yourself with God and don't look at others and say, well, I do this.

I put my faith into practice this way. He doesn't. Why doesn't he do what I do? He says, never mind him. Have faith to yourself. Obey the Lord yourself and let the Lord worry about this other servant. That's what it means. There's no, there's no challenge, there's no dichotomy, no contrast between James and Paul. They're teaching the same thing. They're following the same gospel teaching. You see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith only. Likewise, we thought Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way. You see, there could have been lots of people in Jericho who thought, yeah, you know, Jehovah probably is the true God and maybe these Israelites, maybe they are going to conquer the land, but they didn't do anything about it.

[29 : 47] But Rahab took her life in her hands. She sheltered the spies. She sent them away in peace. She protected them. She covered for them. She put her faith into practice and she likewise ended up being saved with the rest of her family from the destruction of Jericho because of what she had done.

Not simply what she thought in her head. This is what James is getting at. Whereas the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

You have to put it into practice. Otherwise, all you've got is a corpse. A corpse of so-called faith that needs to be brought alive.

It needs to be put into practice. And that's what we have to think about for that is how do we show outwardly who we belong to?

How do we show outwardly that we belong to Christ? If we have the faith within, that has to be shown on the outside as well. It has to be shown in our daily lives.

[30 : 52] It has to be shown in our business practices. It has to be shown in our relationships with other people. It has to be shown in our attitude to the poor and to the vulnerable. To animals and creatures of the field as well as to vulnerable human beings.

How we are towards others reflects how we hope the Lord will be toward us. Mercy rejoices against judgment.

And as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. Thank you. We should.