

2. James 2 of a Verse by Verse Study of James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter

James chapter one gave specific acts of obedience that a Christian must faithfully keep in service to the Lord. One of these commands in James 1:9-11 teaches that there is no distinction between Christians as to whether they are of high or low position:

9 The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. 10 But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

James 2 begins with this same teaching, but extends it with a specific example of how it takes place in the meetings of the church.

Favoritism and Respect of Persons

James 2:1-4: *1 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

The command given by James is direct: "as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism." The example—one of high and rich status and one of low and poor status—is common to us today. What is the sin? The answer is that we discriminate among ourselves and become judges with evil thoughts. All discrimination comes from evil thoughts. The application of the principle applies to wealth, ethnicity, sexual discrimination, etc.—all of which are present in our society today. Paul left little room for doubt about the requirement to be no respecter of persons. Paul taught in Gal 3:27-28:

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ.

28 There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one (man) in Christ Jesus.

James 1:5-7: *5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?*

When God chose us—whether rich or poor—through the gospel, he sanctified us to the highest calling—the calling through the Gospel. All those so chosen are so rich that they will inherit the kingdom that he promised, according to 2 Thess 2:13-14:

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The rich exploit us, not the poor. The rich drag us into court. The rich slander the noble name of Christ.

There is no distinction of persons allowed among God's children. All Christians should attain the status of one who is **poor** in spirit. Jesus taught in Matt 5:3, "3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Keeping the Royal Law

James 2:8-13: *8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are*

doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, 13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

Clearly, the royal law is one found in the Scriptures, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus taught emphatically that this command summed up the Old Testament law in Matt 22:37-40:

37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Paul explained how love of fellowman fulfills the law in Rom 13:8-10:

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself. "10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

The correct application of the law teaches an important lesson to us today. If we show favoritism, we may keep all the rest of the law, and still be lost. Christians cannot ignore a command and think that God will save them.

God will judge us with mercy, if we show mercy. "Mercy triumphs over judgment!" is a principle eternal. Just as our brothers and sisters stand before us imperfectly, so will we stand before the Lord imperfectly. Christians must resolve to show mercy to our fellow Christians.

Faith without Works

James 2:14-19: *14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

Faith without works cannot save. Of course, works without faith cannot save either. Faith without action is dead. The demons believe that there is one God, but without following the commands of God, they are lost. The same is true of all men.

James 2:20-25: *20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*

25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Abraham and Rahab the harlot were justified by what they did and not by faith alone. The concluding point is that "faith without deeds is dead."