

# James 2 - Partiality; Gossip; The Principle of Faith and Works

## I. Faith (James 1:1–3:12)

- (5) Faith does not show favoritism (2:1-13)
  - (A) Exhortation not to show favoritism (2:1)
  - (B) Concept applied to a church service (2:2-4)
  - (C) God does not show favoritism in election (2:5)
  - (D) The rich oppress the poor (2:6-7)
  - (E) Favoritism violates the Law (2:8-11)
  - (F) God will judge favoritism (2:12-13)
- (6) Useful faith manifests itself in works (2:14-26)
  - (A) Works accompany useful faith (2:14)
  - (B) Illustrations (2:15-26)
    - (a) Brother in need (2:15-17)
    - (b) Demonic monotheism (2:18-19)
    - (c) Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (2:20-24)
    - (d) Rahab and the spies (2:25)
    - (e) Body and its spirit (2:26)

## James 2

- (5) Faith does not show favoritism (2:1-13)
  - (A) Exhortation not to show favoritism (2:1)

**1 My brothers and sisters, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.**

**1** My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of personal favoritism*.

**1** My brothers, do not let your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be tainted by favoritism.

**1** My brethren, have ["hold"] not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

– "My brothers and sisters...your faith" – more evidence that James is writing to believers  
— James audience doesn't need the gospel in order to be saved; they need instruction on how to live like what they already are

- This is so important to understand in this epistle (and all of the Hebrew Christian epistles) because if you don't, you'll be completely confused by what James says in 2:12-13 and 2:14-26.
  - "...do not hold" - echo, imperative mood, meaning it's not a suggestion but a command
  - The faith is there, but James says that as you walk out your faith in service, don't do so with an attitude of personal favoritism
  - This command, and the commands throughout James, are not addressed to unbelievers because they have no possibility of doing them without the Holy Spirit
  - "...glorious Lord Jesus Christ" - during His ministry Jesus never showed personal favoritism. In fact, He received criticism from the Pharisees for eating with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:15-17). Their criticism came because they themselves were showing favoritism.
  - Jesus did the same thing with the woman at the well (John 4), a woman of the wrong gender, wrong race, and extremely morally corrupt
  - It was Jesus' character to never show personal favoritism; this is why James, the half-brother of Jesus, as he gives believers a command to not show personal favoritism, instructs us to do this in the attitude of our "glorious"
  - How could a believer in Christ even consider showing favoritism when Jesus died to atone for the sins of the entire world (1 John 2:2)?
  - "...personal favoritism" - *prosōpolēmpsia*, partiality, favoritism; showing favor to one person over another for no biblical reason
  - Definition of *prosōpolēmpsia*: the fault of one who when called on to requite or to give judgment has respect to the outward circumstances of men and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high-born, or powerful, to another who is destitute of such gifts.
  - "Favoritism" or "partiality" implies an inclination to favor a person because of strong fondness or attachment. For example, an orchestra conductor may be partial to the works of a certain composer.
  - James commands his readers to not compromise the faith by showing partiality based on social position
  - Admiring a person because of his position in life was expressly forbidden by the Mosaic Law (Lev 19:15)
  - If we show favoritism in any form or fashion to a person based upon their outward appearance, monetary wealth, social status, race or rank, James says that this behavior does not mirror that of a true believer in Christ.

The chapter division between 1:27 and 2:1 disguises the linkage between "not showing favoritism" and "being polluted by the world." The way we behave toward people indicates

what we really believe about God! (1 John 4:20).

Treating people with partiality may spring from predilection, from prejudice, or from bias:

- Predilection: implies a preconceived liking formed as a result of one's background, temperament, etc., that inclines one to a particular preference. We might say a certain person has a predilection for murder mysteries.
- Prejudice: implies a preconceived and unreasonable judgment or opinion, usually an unfavorable one, marked by suspicion, fear, intolerance, or hatred. We might say racial prejudice incited a certain lynch mob.
- Bias: implies a mental leaning in favor of or against someone or something without passing judgment on the correctness or incorrectness of the preference. One might say someone has a bias toward the color blue. James was dealing primarily with partiality.

(B) Concept applied to a church service (2:2-4)

2 For if a man comes into your **assembly** with a **gold ring** and is **dressed in bright clothes**, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in,

2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

2 Suppose a man wearing gold rings and fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in.

2 For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

- "...assembly" - *synagōgē*, synagogue, church (5:14); denotes a primitive form of Hebraic worship (James was first NT epistle written, see Introduction)

- "...gold ring...dressed in bright clothes" - giving all of the outward appearances of wealth  
— James is not condemning the gold rings or the flashy clothing. He's condemning the church for their favorable reaction to it.

3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good *place*," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

3 If you give special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Please take this seat," but you say to the poor man, "Stand over there" or "Sit on the floor at my feet,"

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him,

- Verses 2-3 James gives a description of what his original audience was doing...they were treating the rich one way and the poor another way
- This is a good transition from 1:26-27, where James was talking helping the widows and orphans...he says something similar here, but in a different context.
- If widows and orphans are neglected by the church, but the rich are catered to, that is showing favoritism
- Our fallen sin nature makes it nearly impossible for us to not show some type of bias in favor or against others, based on looks, gender, nationality/race, appearance, social status, personality, those we differ with politically or theologically, or numerous other categories.

Why is favoritism contrary to God's character and purposes (2:4-13)?

1. We judge where God has not (v4)
2. God elects all (v5)
3. Rich oppressors (v6-7)
4. Favoritism violates God's Law (v8-11)
5. God will judge those showing favoritism (v12-13)

4 have you not made **distinctions among yourselves**, and **becomejudges** with **evil motives**?

4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

4 then you will have made false distinctions among yourselves and will have judged from evil motives, will you not?

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

- "...distinctions among yourselves" - when we show favoritism, we've created a distinction (or barrier) among persons that God Himself has not made

— When we show favoritism within the church, we re-erect the "barrier of the dividing wall" between one group and another (Eph 2:14) that God broke down

- "...become judges" - if I've put a barrier in the church that God never put there, then I make myself into a judge; I'm a judge because I've decided something that God has not decided: God broke down the dividing wall, and by making distinctions, I'm putting it back up.

— God hasn't spoken to that issue (placed a barrier there), so I'm acting alone, outside of what God has decried. I've divided where God has not divided.

- "...evil motives" - three words for evil in Greek, this is the worst type

— The evil motive of favoritism is the giving of preferential treatment to someone based upon what you perceive they can do for the church, rather than what the church can do for them

- It's not a problem to understand what James is saying...the problem lies in recognizing it in our own lives and stomping it out
- The human heart is so wicked that you could do the right thing with the wrong motive
- We can fool a lot of people, but we can't fool God. Some day, at the Bema Seat judgment (1 Cor 4:5), where God will disclose the motives of men's hearts (Cf. Matt 9:4).
- Important to understand what James is saying and not saying...
- James is not putting every person on equal footing or at a common level; there is no global equality of persons
- We must still allow proper respect for people to whom respect is due; James is not condemning preferential treatment. To honor an elderly woman to the detriment of a teenage boy is not forbidden, or even what James is talking about.
- Members of armed forces come to church...to clear out special seats in the front and show special recognition...not a problem

1 Peter 2:17: Honor all people. Love the church. Fear God. Honor the king.

### Favoritism vs Preference?

- Choosing friends is something we usually want to do ourselves, but James has a few warnings for us in this chapter
  - Be careful why you choose the friends you do, because choosing friends for the wrong reason is sin
- Favoritism is giving favorable treatment to a person strictly on the basis of outward appearance, wealth or social status, or what they can do for me
- Preference is giving proper respect for people to whom it is due: presidents, governments, authorities, veterans, etc.
  - James obviously saw this problem in the Jerusalem church at the time, which was under persecution and was very poor
  - James is not condemning the gold rings or the flashy clothing...he condemns believers for their favorable reaction to it

(C) God does not show favoritism in election (2:5)

5 Listen, my beloved brothers *and sisters*: did God not **choose** the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and **heirs of the kingdom** which He promised to those who love Him?

5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

5 Listen, my dear brothers! God has chosen the poor in the world to become rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who keep on loving him, has he not?

5 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 him?

- "...choose" - God chooses (elects) all who come to salvation, and that includes the poor
- The point is that God doesn't show favoritism by whom He chooses to save (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:24-25); He elects people from across the spectrum
- In fact, God elects more poor people than He does rich people (Cf. Luke 1:52-53; 1 Cor 1:26)
- There is no spiritual merit in poverty, but God has chosen many of them on the basis of His grace
- The poor may be at a physical disadvantage to the rich, but they are not at a spiritual disadvantage
- The attitude of these "judges" toward the poor contradicts God's attitude toward them (Cf. v6a)
- "...heirs of the kingdom" - an "heir" is someone who has a legal right to something, but they have not received it yet; they legally own it
- If we are already in the kingdom, why would James indicate that we are "heirs" of the kingdom?
- Legally, we have citizenship in the kingdom, we have an "entrance ticket," but we are still heirs at this time because we have not entered it yet, nor are we enjoying it yet.

"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." (Matt 8:20) He had to borrow a coin to illustrate the truth. He borrowed a donkey to present Himself to Jerusalem. He borrowed a room to celebrate Passover. He died on a borrowed cross: it belonged to Barabbas, not to Him. They put Him in a borrowed tomb—it belonged to Joseph of Arimathea (Is 53:1-3; Job 5:15; 36:15; Ps 9:18; 68:10; 69:33; 72:12-13; 102:17; Is 11:4).

(D) The rich oppress the poor (2:6-7)

6 But you have **dishonored** the poor man. Is it not the rich who **oppress** you and personally drag you into court?

6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

6 But you have humiliated the man who is poor. Are not rich people the ones who oppress you and drag you into court?

6 But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

- Interpreting this verse as evidence that God hates wealth or that rich people are bad is a distortion of Scripture. It's not a question of if a person has wealth, it's a question if your

wealth has you; do you own possessions or do your possessions own you?

- Once your money becomes a god, then it's a problem (Matt 6:24; 1 Tim 6:10,17-18)
- James is not condemning wealth in this passage, quite the contrary: James is condemning the rich who got rich by oppressing others, by taking advantage or exploiting the poor in order to gain wealth.
- James 5:4 puts this verse in context: James is condemning wealthy oppressors who didn't pay their laborers. They got rich through slave labor, using people for labor then not paying them.
- "...dishonored" - describes someone who crouches in the presence of a superior
- These judges' attitudes toward the poor man forces the poor man to crouch even further
- This highlights the contrast between their attitude toward the poor and God's attitude toward the poor
- "...oppress" - *katadynasteuō*, pictures a king exercising his authority over his subjects in a hurtful or oppressive manner
- The rich were exercising their authority over Jewish believers in such a way as to hurt them
- The same Greek word is used in Acts 10:38, where it speaks of Satan's oppressive rule over his subjects: the way the rich were ruling over Jewish believers is the same way Satan is ruling over his subjects.

James 5:4: Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

1 Tim 6:17-18:

- 17** Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.
- 18 *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,
- 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

Prov 10:4: Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich.

- Scripture commends industry (hard work) that leads to wealth
- One person is poor and one is rich, and it's not always the case that the rich person became rich by exploiting the poor person

- The Bible says here that you can become poor and it's your own fault due to laziness, and you can become rich because of diligence

Ex 23:3: nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his dispute.

- This passage talks about judging impartially in Israel...

- We're not to show favoritism to the rich person because they are rich, but we're also not supposed to show favoritism to the poor just because they are poor

7 Do they not blaspheme the good name by which you have been called?

7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

7 Are not they the ones who blaspheme the noble Name by which you have been called?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

- The people whom these believers are showing preference toward are the same people who are oppressing the poor in order to become rich (v6), and who are blaspheming Jesus Christ (v7).

#### (E) Favoritism violates the Law (2:8-11)

**8** If, however, you are fulfilling the **royallaw** according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

**8** If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

**8** Nevertheless, you are doing the right thing if you obey the royal Law in keeping with the Scripture, "You must love your neighbor as yourself."

**8** If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

- "...royal law" - while James' quote is also quoted from Lev 19:18, he's not quoting the Law of Moses, but rather the "royal law" (the Law of Christ)

- In v12, James references the "law of liberty"; why does James refer to the "royal law" and "law of liberty" when he's quoting the Mosaic Law? Because he's not quoting the Mosaic Law, but rather the Law of Christ or Law of the Spirit, which Church Age believers are under, not the Mosaic Law.

- Quoting from Lev 19:18 (part of the Mosaic Law about God's Laws concerning treatment of others); James is saying that when we show favoritism, we are violating God's law

- The Bible never promotes self-love, because we don't have a problem loving ourselves...we get enough sleep, we eat to be filled. We don't have any problem with self-love, we know how to get our way. These things come naturally to us.

- The problem comes in when we don't transfer the love we have for ourselves to someone else

- James' point is that when you show favoritism in the assembly, based on what they might do for you, you're not loving them as you love yourself, you're doing it out of self-love. And when you do this out of self-love, you're violating God's law.
- In Mark 12:28-31, Jesus declared this law to be the second most important commandment in the Mosaic Law
- The background for James' teaching is the Sermon on the Mount, which provided the Law's true standard of righteousness as taught by Jesus.
- Christian love means treating others as God has treated me
- James is not quoting Lev 19:18 to put Church Age believers back under the Law. For a description of this, see [James 09 Law and Grace \(James 2:6-9\)](#) and [James 10 Judging the Judges \(James 2:10-13\)](#).

9 But **if** you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the **Law** as violators.

9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors.

9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and will be convicted by the Law as violators.

9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

- James now establishes what it means to not do well (Cf. v8c)

- "...if" - a first class condition ("since"), showing that this has become a deliberate practice

- "...Law" - the Mosaic Law, which contains the "royal law" (v8); those who practiced partiality were in violation of the Mosaic Law (Cf. Lev 19:18)

— While the Mosaic Law was no longer in effect, many of James' readers were convinced it was still in force for them (Acts 21:20). The full revelation on this issue had not yet been given when this epistle was written.

— To show partiality is to commit sin because it falls short of God's righteous standard

10 For whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one *point*, has become **guilty of all**.

10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

10 For whoever keeps the whole Law but fails in one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

- There are 613 commandments in the Mosaic Law; if a person somehow succeeds in keeping 612 of them, but breaks one of them, he is viewed by God as being guilty of breaking all of them.

- "...guilty of all" – not violated every command, but violated the unity of the law
- The Law is not a series of single requirements, but is a unified command that requires perfect love of God and our neighbors
- While not all sins are equally damaging, they all shatter that unity and render men as sinners
- See **Mosaic Covenant > The Unity of the Law of Moses** in [8 Covenants of the Bible](#) for details about the unity of the Mosaic Law.

11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do murder, you have become a violator of the Law.

11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

11 For the one who said, "Never commit adultery," also said, "Never murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you murder, you become a violator of the Law.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

- James is talking about the Law of Christ, not the Law of Moses
- James' point is that whatever legal system you're under, you cannot pick and choose what parts you want to obey. If you stumble over any part of it, you're guilty of all of it.
- Overall, James is saying that we stumble over the Law of Christ when we show favoritism to some not others in the church. We are lawbreakers if we show favoritism in the Church.
- All 613 commands in the Mosaic Law were issued by the same God; all 613 commands are stamped with the same authority, and all equally express the will of the same Lawgiver.
- To violate even one of these commands is to resist the authority upon which all the commandments are founded
- This does not mean that a person has broken every Law, nor does it mean that every violation is equally serious. They are not, and for that reason, there were different types of punishment for different offenses.
- However, it does mean and does show that the Law is one grand unity; therefore, violating any commandment is an offense against the Lawgiver.
- To have respect of persons is already to incur the guilt of the whole law
- This principle goes against the common tendency to divide the Law of Moses into two (the Ten Commandments and the other 603) or three (moral, civil, ceremonial) parts. The Law of Moses is all one unit and it is either all in force or none of it is in force.

(F) God will judge favoritism (2:12-13)

12 So **speak**, and so **act**, as those who are to be judged by *the law of freedom*.

12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the law of liberty*.

12 You must make it your habit to speak and act like people who are going to be judged by the law of liberty.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

- The verbs in this verse ("speak" and "do") are commands in the present tense, emphasizing that habitual (continual) actions are required

- "...speak" - manifested in words

- "...act" - manifested in works

— Both are to be done as if we will be judged by these words and works (because we will be!)

— Both Jesus (John 5:24) and Paul (Rom 8:1) assured us that Christian believers will never be judged for their sins, but our works will be judged and rewarded (Rom 14:10-13; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Col 3:22-25)

— Our words will be judged (Matt 12:36; James 2:3)

— The means by which our words and works will be done is the "law of liberty"

13 For **judgment** *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

13 For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

13 For the one who has shown no mercy will be judged without mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

- "...judgment" - refers to the Bema Seat judgment of Christ, just after the Rapture

- Their treatment of the poor (v1-9) reflects a lack of mercy

— A person who shows no mercy or compassion for those in need demonstrates he has not responded to the mercy of God, and will be judged accordingly

- The point is: if we show mercy, we will gain mercy; if we show judgment, we will gain judgment

### **The Principle of Faith and Works** James 11 Clearing Up the Confusion (James 2:14)

To understand this passage properly, one must understand the background. Unfortunately, 99% of the teaching on this passage is inaccurate. 99% of the Christian world believes that this passage says that if a believer doesn't have enough works after their (alleged) conversion to Christianity, they really were never a Christian to start with. If a person claims to be saved, but doesn't display the works that we believe we should see in them, then they were never saved.

The problem with the Reformed view of this passage, the view of 99% of Christians, Bible scholars, etc. is how they answer the question...how many good works does a Christian have to perform to prove they are saved? When they are asked that question, they can give no specific or even suitable answer because there isn't one.

The Reformed view of this passage asks a question that James is not answering: those who have professed Christ at some point in the past, but who have since walked away from the faith and made no progress in their sanctification, are they really saved because they do not demonstrate good works? This is a valid question, and something that people in James' day may have wondered, as well as people today, but this is not the question James is answering.

James is writing to an audience of *believers* (1:18; 2:5; 4:5, et al). He's not dealing with a situation where he's writing to people that he doesn't know if they are saved or not.

Nowhere does James call into question his audience's salvation because they don't have enough good works. The purpose of James' epistle is to encourage and help Christians, who likely were at one time part of his ministry/church in Jerusalem, to grow in their faith. It's a book on practical righteousness, for the benefit of believers, not a book on how to be saved/justified. James is dealing with practical sanctification in this epistle, not justification.

It's sad that a passage such as this, which is one of the most straight-forward in all of Scripture on how to live the Christian life, has been corrupted so badly by Satan in the mind of many believers that it has completely lost its relevance in the Church today except for seemingly providing Christians a baton they can use to judge or doubt the salvation of fellow believers.

## AN IMPASSABLE CHASM YAWNS BETWEEN

WHAT MAN'S  
WISDOM  
TEACHES  
↓

AND

WHAT GOD'S  
WORD  
TEACHES  
↓

*Salvation is by  
ATTAINMENT  
upon the ground of  
HUMAN MERIT.  
What you need is a  
NEW START,  
in other words turning  
a NEW LEAF.  
Now then with your motto  
"DO"  
DEVELOP YOURSELF  
in CHARACTER.*

*"Yours is the Earth and everything  
that's in it, and - which is more -  
you'll be a Man, my son!"*  
Kipling

*Salvation is by  
ATONEMENT  
upon the ground of  
DIVINE MERCY.  
What you need is a  
NEW HEART,  
in other words receiving  
& NEW LIFE.  
Now that your motto is  
"DONE"  
John 19:30 - Rom. 10:4.  
ENVELOP YOURSELF  
with CHRIST. Rom. 13:14*

*"All things are yours" ... 1 Cor. 3:21  
and - which is more - you are  
a Child of God my brother!"  
1 John 3:1-3*

## Harmony Between Paul and James

	PAUL	JAMES
Phase of Salvation	Justification	Sanctification
Tense of Salvation	First tense	Second tense
Issue	Self righteous Judaism	Dead orthodoxy
Genesis	Gen 15:6	Gen 22

Issue:

- Paul is focused on the issue of self-righteous Judaism...people who think they're right with God solely on the basis of their good works. This is what Paul condemns throughout Romans and Galatians, etc.
- James is not focused at all on the question of whether you have enough works to be a Christian. Instead, he's focused on dead orthodoxy...people who are believers, but they aren't useful to God because their faith is not a useful faith. They have saving faith, but because of their lack of good works, they will not be rewarded in heaven.

Much of the misunderstanding of this passage is rooted in the differences in vocabulary used by James and Paul. If you think both are answering the same question, you'll always be confused by this passage. But if you understand that James and Paul are using the same words, but in a different sense, answering different questions, the light bulb will go on and the passage will make perfect sense.

## Harmony Between Paul and James

	PAUL	JAMES
Justification	Declaration of innocence before God	Evidence of the usefulness believer's faith before man
Save	Justification	Sanctification
Faith	Saving faith	Serving faith
Works	Favor with God	Believer's moral deeds

### Justification:

- Paul means a declaration of innocence before God that a lost sinner receives the moment they trust Christ.
- James means the evidence of the usefulness of the believer's faith before man (not God). Abraham's faith did not become productive until he was willing to sacrifice his son. That is when Abraham became justified before man, 20 years after he was justified before God (Gen 15:6).

### Save:

- Justification: Paul talks about being saved from hell (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5)
- Sanctification: James is talking about our walk, as we're being saved from sin's power (Phil 2:12-15)
  - James does not address the eternal destiny of his readers, but rather the profitability and productivity for Christ in their daily lives

### Faith:

- Paul: saving faith...when did you trust in Christ for salvation?

- James: serving faith...the same faith in God that brought you salvation/justification is the same faith you should have when as a believer you encounter trials; utter dependence upon God (Cf. Rom 12:3-8)
  - The faith spoken of in James 2:14ff is always the faith of a Christian, a believer in Christ, a person whose eternal destiny is undoubtedly in heaven. It is NOT the initial faith of an unsaved sinner in response to the gospel, nor is it simply an intellectual faith that does not save.

Works:

- Paul: denounces the use of good works as a means for salvation/justification (Cf. Eph 2:9-10)
- James: believer's moral deeds, works that God wants to produce in us as our faith becomes productive and He uses us to expand His purposes on the earth. Our faith doesn't just exist (dead orthodoxy), but it becomes productive. These good works, which God does through the believer, have no bearing on whether or not you're saved and going to heaven someday. There will be people in heaven one day who have done absolutely no good works at all while on the earth (1 Cor 3:15; Cf. the thief on the cross). This situation is what James is warning against in this passage...he wrote this epistle to prevent believers from entering heaven and having their works completely burned up and receiving no reward.

Reformed Theology says that not all faith is saving faith...there is the faith that saves and the faith that doesn't save. But James is unaware of this distinction. Any faith that is exercised in Christ for salvation saves. As a believer encounters a trial in their Christian walk, Reformed Theology says that you never had true authentic faith.

James does not deal with this doctrine at all...James says, your faith is real, you are saved/justified and you're going to heaven. You're one of God's children, but you're in a crisis in your life, you're afraid or intimidated to step out and do something for the Lord. James says that what you need to do is not question whether or not you're saved...you need to take the saving faith that you already have and exercise that in a different area...no longer in the sense of justification, but exercise it in same God who saves, but apply it to your "problem."

Many pastors who dare to preach on this passage (most avoid it like the plague) will harp on the "tension" between Paul and James, then attempt to slither a blurry line between Paul's emphatic "saved by grace through faith, not of works" and James' emphatic "faith without works is dead." The result is often a confusing gobblity-gook of words without meaning. In reality, Paul and James are in complete agreement that...

- justification (forensic/heavenly) *before God* is by faith alone in Christ alone
- justification (practical/earthly) *before men* is by faith-produced works

(6) Useful faith manifests itself in works (2:14-26)

(A) Works accompany useful faith (2:14)

**14** What use is it, my brothers and sisters, if **someone** says he has **faith**, but he has no **works**? Can that faith **save** him?

**14** What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

**14** What good does it do, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but does not prove it with actions? This kind of faith cannot save him, can it?

**14** What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can [that kind of] faith save him?

- It's important to interpret these verses properly...

- In this verse, James asks two questions about faith in relation to works. Both questions in this verse are rhetorical, and both demand a negative answer.

1. My brethren, what does it profit if a man says he has faith but he has no works?
  - a. James' concern is the profit that other people will receive if a Christian has a faith that is not productive
    - i. As with the commands and exhortations of James up to this point in his epistle, the questions in v14 are designed to stimulate thought by believers about the relationship between faith and works as they impact other believers.
  - b. Notice that the question is directed to "my brothers and sisters (in Christ)"
    - i. Christians are clearly in James' focus here, as in 1:2,3,12,18,21,22; 2:1
    - ii. Neither of these questions have any relationship nor are they being asked of unbelievers
2. Can faith save him (the believer who has faith but no works)?
  - a. The interpretive question is: save him from what? Hell or sin's degradation in our Christian walk?
    - i. The answer is the latter: it is obviously deliverance from sin's degradation, as it was in 1:21 where believers were encouraged to "receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls"
    - ii. James indicates that there is a reciprocity between Word-produced works (being "doers of the Word") and deliverance of the soul from sin's hang-ups. It is this same deliverance described in 1:21 that James has in mind in 2:14.
  - "...someone" - tis, indefinite pronoun; James uses tis to refer to a believer in 1:23 ("any"); 1:26 ("any man"); 2:18 ("a man"); 3:2 ("any man"). Here, he is raising the issue of what any *believer* might say, not an unbeliever.
  - "...faith" - here is where the confusion comes in...Paul and James use the same words (see Harmony Between Paul and James chart below). Paul refers to saving faith

(justification); James refers to sanctifying or sustaining faith

— See quote from Lewis Sperry Chafer at end of this chapter on the various types of faith found in Scripture

- "...works" - both Paul and James use works, however James is talking about a believer's moral deeds that demonstrate to his fellow man that his faith has graduated from merely a saving faith to a serving faith

- "...save" - *sōzō*, Paul speaks of "save" in terms of our justification (Cf. Eph 2:8-9); James speaks of "save" in terms of our progressive sanctification (Phil 2:12)

— Paul refers to being "saved" from hell through faith in Christ; James refers to be "saved" (delivered) from the power of sin through faith in Christ

- James uses *sōzō* in the same context in James 1:21; 5:19-20, neither of which refer to justification, but rather sanctification

— The command in 1:21 to "receive the engrafted word which is able to save your souls" is/was to be received by Christians, not unbelievers. It clearly refers to second tense salvation (sanctification), deliverance from the power of sin. In the Greek text, there is a similar construction between 1:21 & 2:14.

— Even the reference to "the saving of the soul" in 5:19-20 is the soul of a fellow believer. This is a critical point that Lordship Salvation adherents and Roman Catholics both miss.

Because of James' descriptions in this passage, some have concluded that he is contradicting Paul. However, it becomes clear there is no conflict once you understand that James and Paul (in Galatians) are asking and answering two different questions. If you think they are answering the same question, they absolutely contradict one another, but in fact they are answering very different questions.

## Harmony Between Paul and James

	PAUL	JAMES
Justification	Declaration of innocence before God	Evidence of usefulness of believer's faith before man
Save	Justification	Sanctification
Faith	Saving faith	Serving faith
Works	Favor with God	Believer's moral deeds

### 1. Issue

- Paul in Galatians is addressing self-righteous Judaism. He's dealing with people who think they can earn justification/favor from God through good works. They are trying to save themselves through good works rather than by faith.
- James is dealing with dead orthodoxy. He doesn't even get into an issue around justification because his readers are already believers. He consistently calls them "my brethren" and talks about "their faith being tested." Your faith can't be tested if you are not in faith (saved). James is dealing with saved people who are not available for use as God would like to use them (Cf. Eph 2:10).

### 2. Justification: both Paul and James use the term "justification" but they mean different things:

- Paul is talking about a declaration of innocence before God, which we receive when we trust Christ. To Paul, justification meant acquittal, and Paul was concerned with legal justification in that no man can gain justification by means of works, specifically the works of the Law.

- James is talking about the evidence of the usefulness of somebody's faith, not before God but before man. He's not questioning if they have saving faith, he's questioning if their faith is useful before man. Is God using them to reach others? To James, justification meant vindication, and he was concerned with the justification of one's profession of faith in that his claim must be demonstrated by his works, specifically the works of love and faith.

### 3. Genesis: both Paul and James quote Genesis

- Paul quotes Gen 15:6, describing Abram's justification
- James quotes Gen 22, the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice of Isaac. Gen 15:6 is where Abraham got saved/justified, Gen 22 is where Abraham's faith became useful, and it was justified before man. Chronologically, it took about 20 years (between Gen 15 and Gen 22) for Abraham's faith to no longer be just dead orthodoxy, but productive. Abraham was saved before God in Gen 15, but he did not become justified before man in terms of useful, productive faith, a faith that God can use, until Gen 22.

### 4. Faith

- Paul talks about faith in Galatians, he is referring to our justification before God.
- James talks about faith, he is referring to that same faith (by which we were justified before God) and says that it is the same faith you'll need to pay next month's mortgage payment. Or what if you get laid off from your job...you'll have to have faith that God will provide and carry you through. So the faith that Paul talks about saves once and for all; James talks about how that same faith is used over and over again, contributing not to your justification (which is already a done deal), but to your sanctification. Paul is talking about faith in the sense of justification; James is talking about faith in the sense of sanctification.

### 5. Works:

- Paul argued against works as a means of justification. When Paul uses the term "works" he is referring to people who believe they can curry God's favor by their good works. Paul condemns it, because we're justified by faith alone.
- James argued in favor of works in the lives of those who have already been justified. When James talks about works, he's talking about the believer's moral deeds. James encourages it, because he's exhorting his readers to get out of dead orthodoxy.

Here's what the Christian life looks like, and what the story of Abraham is designed to tell us: A person hears the gospel and gets saved. They are justified before God at that point in time, their position is eternally settled. Then God begins to grow them up, often through trials, brings them into maturity. He gets them into an environment where they can be

taught correctly, He gets them into the spiritual disciplines (reading/studying the Bible, prayer, worship). The person starts to grow and develop spiritually, then they reach a point where God begins to use them to bless other people.

Paul is dealing with the front end of this equation...justification before God. James is dealing with the back end of this equation. If you understand that Galatians and James are asking and answering two different questions, the contradictions and confusion between the two melt away.

The doctrine of salvation is a wonderful thing. It's not just hearing the gospel and trusting in Christ so I don't go to hell. It's growing to the point of usefulness. James is dealing with the usefulness side, Paul is dealing with the first step, which is justification. If you don't understand that they are discussing different sides of the doctrine, they look like they contradict each other.

### **False Faith: A Clear & Present Danger**

There are many churches on TV, with 30,000 attendees, who exalt self-esteem or soothe their conscience..."you are great, you can be your best." James says: No, you aren't. If someone tells you that you are, you better beware. What good is it if a man claims to have faith and there is no evidence in his life, can that faith save him from Hell? The Bible makes it clear that it's very possible to make a profession of faith, which is a profession of something they don't have. In fact, "many" will say to Jesus in that day...Lord, Lord, look at all the things I've done for you (Matt 7:21-23)...but their works alone are unacceptable.

Today, many churches are so evangelistically minded that they spend time and resources to get people to make an outward, visible confession of their faith...come forward, be baptized, etc. There's nothing wrong with that, but people are confused and think it's the outward action that brings salvation rather than the inward transformation of the heart.

No one is ever saved by a profession of faith. But if you're saved, you will give a profession of faith. No one is saved through water baptism, but if you're saved, you will be water baptized. We should be careful to not allow people to fall into the fatal error of thinking that all someone has to do is to say that we have faith or to profess that faith. **It is the possession of faith that links us to Christ, not the profession of faith.**

James' thesis statement (v14) is: Can a believer make progress in their sanctification and become useful to others, and be fully rewarded at the Bema Seat judgment of Christ, if he has no works? James' answer is: No!

If you're a Christian, saved by God's grace and on your way to heaven, but if there are no good works in your life that demonstrate progress in your sanctification and are a blessing to others, then you are not progressing or maturing in terms of your faith. Your faith cannot be mature or useful if you have no works.

James is questioning the usefulness of his reader's faith, not its existence.

James now goes on for 12 verses, giving five illustrations to back up and bolster his thesis statement. None of these illustrations say that if you don't have enough works you're not a Christian. Rather, these illustrations show that a believer must demonstrate works in order to be useful and productive, not something you rely on to get to heaven. Our works toward others are something that God uses to advance His cause and purposes on the earth.

1. Brother in need (2:15-17)
2. Demonic monotheism (2:18-19)
3. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (2:20-24)
4. Rahab and the spies (2:25)
5. Body and its spirit (2:26)

(B) Illustrations (2:15-26)

(a) Brother in need (2:15-17)

15 If a **brother or sister** is without clothing and in need of daily food,  
15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,  
15 Suppose a brother or sister does not have any clothes or daily food  
15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,  
- "...brother or sister" - refers to fellow believers  
— For James, a poor believer without clothing or daily food was not a hypothetical situation, since he was the head of a poverty-stricken church (Acts 4:35; 6:1; 11:29-30)

16 and **one of you** says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?

16 and one of you tells them, "Go in peace! Stay warm and eat heartily." If you do not provide for their bodily needs, what good does it do?

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

- After defining the need (v15), James now gives the response of dead works. He compares faith without works to words of compassion without acts of compassion.

— The point is that people with dead faith (a faith separated from Christ) substitute nice words for good deeds. They are all talk and no action. They know the correct vocabulary for prayer, testimony, etc. The issue here is not inability, but a non-working faith.

- "...one of you" - in no way could this be referring to an unbeliever

— James is raising the issue of brothers and sisters in Christ who have unmet need for the vital essentials of life. If a believer ignores their obvious need, it doesn't mean they either

lost their salvation or were never truly saved.

- The rhetorical question again demands a negative answer: there is no profit either to the speaker or to the recipient of these words
- This verse also gives us the purpose of prosperity. Why does God put into the hands of some Christians material things above and beyond what they need? What is God's purpose for blessing some believers high and above their basic needs?
  - His purpose is for those articles of wealth to be a blessing to someone else. God has blessed us so that we can be a blessing of others. That is the purpose of prosperity, not so I can raise my standard of living, but rather to raise the standard of living of others, especially within the body of Christ (Cf. Matt 10:8; 2 Cor 8:14; 1 John 3:17).
  - What if I have the world's goods, been blessed abundantly by God, and I see a person in need and do not do anything tangible help them? See v17.

17 In the same way, **faith** also, if it has no **works**, is **dead**, *being by itself*.

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it does not prove itself with actions, is dead.

17 Even so [a profession of] faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone [by itself].

- This verse is James' conclusion to his point in v14 and his example in v15-16
- If we don't understand God's purpose in providing prosperity, this verse describes the circumstance that we find ourselves in...
- "...faith" - not saving faith, but serving faith
- "...works" - not condemnation of people who think they are right with God through their good works; rather, James is referring to the believer's moral deeds
- His conclusion is that you (believers) have saving faith in Christ, which justifies you before God and get you into heaven one day, but you are not using that same faith in Christ to produce God-ordained good works in your life, thus your saving faith is "dead" (not meaning non-existent, but rather separated from Christ) and thus your faith is of no profit or benefit to mankind and is separated from God's intent for faith.
- "...dead" - *nekros*, used here in its normal scriptural sense, which is that of separation, not annihilation or lack of existence
- Biblically, spiritual death is separation from God, not annihilation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body (see notes/references below). The "second death" is spiritual death perpetuated into eternity, not annihilation or the end of existence.
- The word "dead" in Scripture always carries the idea of "separation" never non-existence. At physical death there is a separation of the soul and spirit from the body, yet that person continues to exist in either heaven or hell.
- Just as there is a separation of the soul and spirit from the body without denying the reality of the soul and spirit, James is not denying the existence or reality of initial faith in

Christ for first-tense salvation among his readers, whose faith was separated from good works.

— So James is not saying that faith does not exist. It does exist, but it is separated from God's intent, hence it is "dead" and profitless to mankind. Thus, James is in total and complete agreement with Paul, who says we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph 2:10; Cf. Titus 3:5-8).

— If you read faith without works is "dead" and equate "dead" with non-existence, you have created an anachronistic (outside of time) exegetical fallacy because you have defined "death" by the 21st century definition and read it back into a 1st century context.

— In this case the faith that exists is separated from works. If someone's faith is separated from their works, that person has a saving faith only; they do not have a serving faith.

— Their faith that they have, which gets them into heaven one day, does not have any useful or productive sense because they've been given the world's goods, but they don't use them for any beneficial purpose to fulfill God's will.

- Reformed Theology denies that someone can have saving faith but not serving faith. They believe that a saving faith that is not a serving faith is no faith. The reason is because they impose their preconceived construct onto Scripture, rather than allow Scripture to inform their construct. Their preconceived construct is Calvinism, which says that unless you have works, and you're persevering in those good works, you're not a Christian. You have a miracle faith, not a saving faith.

- "...by itself" - the faith that is "by itself" or alone is one's saving faith. This phrase proves that the person James is describing has saving faith, because that faith is "by itself" because there are no accompanying works.

— Once a believer allows the Holy Spirit to take the faith we already have and come under His conviction, and you have the world's goods, and you have the faith to step out and use those goods to bless others who are in need practically, and you help them.

— You see the need, you have the ability and means to meet that need, and you don't help them...these are the people James is talking about. If this happens, that person's faith is separated (dead) from their works, which means their faith "by itself" is just a saving faith and hasn't yet graduated into a serving faith.

Dan 12:2: Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt.

- Daniel explaining the final resurrection; those who die without Christ do not cease to exist, they are separated from God for eternity

Matt 25:46: **These will go away into eternal [aiōnios] punishment, but the righteous into eternal [aiōnios] life."**

- When we die, our soul and body are separated; the soul does not stop existing, it's just separated

Luke 16:22,25:

22 Now the poor man **died** and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also **died** and was buried.

- Neither death resulted in non-existence; both men died, but continued to exist, just in different locations

25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'

- The rich man obviously died, but he didn't experience non-existence ("lifted up his eyes"; "he saw"; "he cried out"; he "remembered", etc.)

1 Tim 5:6: But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.

- Death for this woman didn't mean non-existence because she was still alive. "Dead" here means she was separated from God.

So if you read "faith without works is dead" and interpret dead as non-existence, and you say that if there's not enough works then faith is dead (non-existent), then you're violating both the Greek and Hebrew definitions of "death" and making James say something that he isn't saying.

See extensive notes on Eph 2:1 for how "death" is used throughout Scripture. For additional background on this interpretation, and further evidence, see:

[James 12 Faith Without Works is Dead? - Part 1 \(James 2:14\)](#)

[James 13 Faith Without Works is Dead? - Part 2 \(James 2:14-19\)](#)

[James 14 Faith Without Works is Dead? - Part 3 \(James 2:20-24\)](#)

### **Summary of James 2:14-17**

James' concern in this paragraph is highlighted in the word "profit" (v14). "What profit" he asks "is faith without works?" This profit is manward (to "brothers and sisters") as he illustrates in v15-16, ending with the question, "what does this non-works response profit the needy brother or sister?" James' conclusion (v17) is that saving faith, without any works) is dead because it is alone (all you have is saving faith, and you aren't exercising it to benefit others. This Christian person's faith is separated ("dead") from God's intent (Eph 2:10), which is for the profit and benefit others. Nor can this faith have the benefits for its possessor that God has designed, which is to save/deliver him from the power of sin in his life.

(b) Demonic monotheism (2:18-19)

**18** But someone may well say, "You have **faith** and I have **works**; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith **by** my works."

**18** But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

**18** But someone may say, "You have faith, and I have actions." Show me your faith without any actions, and I will show you my faith by my actions.

**18** Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

- "But someone may well say" - a common way for NT authors to introduce an objector (Cf. Rom 9:19; 11:19; 1 Cor 15:35)

— It's important to understand that the imaginary objector (believer) James is quoting here is arguing *against* faith without works (or in favor of James' position that faith should be followed by works)... however, James calls this objector a "foolish fellow" in v20.

- "...faith" - serving faith

- "...works" - a believer's moral deeds

- James is saying that no authentic, useful serving faith exists without the believer's moral deeds

— If you're a Christian with no works, you have a saving faith only, not a serving faith

- "...by" - *ek*, "out of"; shows that the demonstration of faith will have its source in the works this faith produces

**v. 18** "YOU are having  
faith w/o works."



"manifest your faith  
w/o your works"



IMPOSSIBLE:  
FAITH IS NOT  
PERCEIVABLE

"I am having works  
that manifest my faith"



"and I will show you  
my faith by my works."



WORKS (PERCEIVABLE)  
CAN MANIFEST  
FAITH

19 You **believe** that **God is one**. You do well; the **demons** also **believe**, and **shudder**.

19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

19 You believe that there is one God. That's fine! Even the demons believe that and tremble with fear.

19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

— "...believe" [2x] - *pisteuō*, the same word used throughout the NT to describe faith in Christ; used 248x in the NT

— Many use this verse to teach that the demons' belief was mere intellectual ascent, then parlay that into a doctrine that you have to have COPS (commitment, obedience, perseverance, service) in order to prove that you are saved. But this is gleaned an interpretation from the text that isn't there.

— James' point is that even the faith of demons results in some practical manifestation in their lives (they "tremble"), so should not the genuine faith of these believers result in some profitable and demonstrable works toward other believers in need? He's arguing from absurdity.

— The demons understood that Jesus was the Son of God (their Christology was right on); their Eschatology is decent, at least they knew of a final judgment and their future torment (Matt 8:28-29).

— "...God is one" - it doesn't say you believe that Jesus Christ as your Savior; this isn't a verse on human salvation

— The Gospel is not in v19...believing that "God is one" (monotheism) is not the Gospel unto salvation

— Secondly, the plan of salvation is not open to demons;...they can't be saved because salvation is not an option for them. Why? Because Jesus didn't become a demon and die on the Cross, He became a Man.

— "...demons" - demons believe in the existence of God and the deity of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:23-24; 5:1-10; Luke 8:26-33); their theology is better than many theologians today

— Whenever they met Christ when He was on the earth, they bore witness to His Sonship (Matt 8:29-34; Mark 3:11-12; Luke 4:40-41; 8:26-37)

— They know of, and acknowledged, the existence of a place of punishment (Luke 8:31; Matt 8:29); they also recognized Jesus Christ as the Judge (Mark 5:1-13)

— "...shudder" - tremble; even the faith of demons results in some practical manifestation in their lives (shuddering). So shouldn't the genuine faith of believers result in some profitable and demonstrable works toward other believers in need?

The point of this verse, in context, is that monotheism can be believed by men and demons WITHOUT ANY BENEFIT! But faith fulfilling the divine design produces works that bring profit/benefit both to the producer of those works and the receiver.

Reformed Theology has completely hijacked this verse because they believe in the doctrine of "two faiths": the faith that saves and the faith that doesn't save; "head faith" vs "heart faith." They believe there are two faiths because of their overstatement of Total Depravity (the belief that all human beings have no capacity to believe in Christ on their own, despite the fact that the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation"). See notes on Eph 2:1.

They believe that some people are able to believe because God gives them the "gift of faith." Thus they teach that there are many in the body of Christ who have an intellectual faith but not a real faith. They are not one of the elect, and they have never been given the gift of faith.

The problem with this doctrine is that there is no assurance of the believer's salvation. However, 1 John 5:13 tells us that God wants us to have assurance of salvation. Reformed Theology uses this verse to teach that there is a "false faith"; it's the same faith the demons have, and they aren't going to heaven. The demons have the false faith, and you can have that false faith to, and if you do, you're not going to heaven either.

(c) Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (2:20-24)

20 But are you willing to **acknowledge**, you **foolishperson**, that faith without works is **useless**?

20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

20 Do you want proof, you foolish person, that faith without actions is worthless?

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

- James now joins his imaginary ally (of v18-19) to rebuke the speaker of v14,16...

— He is literally saying: Are you (believer of v14 and/or v16) willing to know that the faith (that I have been speaking about) without works is useless?

- "...acknowledge" - *ginōskō*, to learn to know or come to know; "to want proof" of something [ISV]

- "...foolish person" - Paul also uses derogatory words for those who don't understand basic theology (basically, the person of v14,16): the Galatians thought they could live for God through their own power, and Paul calls them "foolish" (Cf. Gal 3:1,3)

- "...useless" - *argos*, the NASB translators get it right when they translate *argos* as "useless" because they recognize that death doesn't mean non-existence, but rather separation

- If James had meant non-existence in v17 and v26, he would have used the same word [*nekros*] in v20 as in v17,26; instead he uses *argos* [useless]
- James is not second-guessing their salvation. When he says "dead" he doesn't mean that their faith is non-existent and they are not saved. He means that their faith is useless because God can't use you to do the things that God wants to do on the earth. Examples of this in James include countering favoritism in the church, blessing widows and orphans, etc., because you lack faith (Cf. 2 Peter 1:8-9).

21 Was **our father** Abraham not **justified** by **works** when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

21 Our ancestor Abraham was justified by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar, wasn't he?

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

— "...our father" - James was Jewish; this is more evidence that he was writing to Jewish believers (1:1; Cf. Rom 4:16-17; Gal 3:7,29)

— All believers can call Abraham "father" in a spiritual sense (Gal 3:29) because Abraham was justified by faith just like we are today

— "...justified" - *dikaioō*, a declaration of innocence before God; it's a declaration of righteousness that we receive from God at the point of faith alone in Christ alone; see note from Thomas Constable below

— Paul uses this term in a vertical sense (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16), man being justified before God

— James uses this term in a horizontal sense to describe the evidence of usefulness of a believer's faith before others. James uses *dikaioō* in the same (horizontal) sense as Jesus does in Matt 12:37.

— "...works" - the believer's moral deeds, not someone trying to gain favor with God through good works

— "...when" - James' question is: Was Abraham justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

— NO, if you are thinking of justification in the forensic sense, being justified before God and entrance into heaven

— YES, if you are thinking of justification in the eyes of other people

— This verse makes it clear that James is speaking of justification as seen by men or as made apparent to men. Works can be seen, faith cannot. The Bible makes it clear that

Abraham was justified before God (saved) some 20-30 years (Gen 15:6) before he offered Isaac (Gen 22).

- Abraham and Sarah waited on God for 25 years for the son of promise, Isaac, to be born. About 15 years later, God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice as a test of his faith to see if Abraham would be willing to do what God said.
- It was at that point that Abraham's faith, which was already in existence in him for 20-30 years, came to the point where it was a useful, productive faith. It was at this point that Abraham was justified in the eyes of man, because his faith had become useful.
- This is in spite of the fact that Abraham had already been justified before God (Gen 15:6); this is when Abraham was made right before God in the eyes of God. It took God 20-30 years to make Abraham's saving faith useful as serving faith.
- By demonstrating his faith in sacrificing Isaac, Abraham was justified a second time, this time in the eyes of man. This is the point in time when Abraham's faith became useful to God to fulfill His purposes.
- James here is urging his readers (and US!) to move on from being just Gen 15:6 believers into being Gen 22 believers
- If it was guaranteed that every Christian would become a Gen 22 believer, why would James write his epistle? There's a prevalent teaching in Christianity that if you are "truly" a Christian, you'll just keep on growing and maturing in your faith, and you'll automatically be useful to God. If that was true, James wouldn't need to write this book.
- Having a faith that is useful to God is not guaranteed or automatic. God has to continually put us into circumstances where we're required to trust Him, which develops our saving faith into a serving faith.

Abraham was declared righteous more than once. Most interpreters understand the first scriptural statement of his justification as describing his 'new birth,' to use the NT term (Gen 15:6). This is when God declared Abraham righteous. James explains (v21) that **20-30 years after** Abraham was declared righteous, he was 'justified' again. Scripture consistently teaches that believers whom God declares righteous never lose their righteous standing before God (Rom 5:1; 8:1, et al). They do not need to be saved again.

Abraham's subsequent, second 'justification' refers to a second declaration of his righteousness. James said this second time Abraham's works declared him righteous. They (his works) gave testimony (bore witness) to his faith. Works do not always evidence faith (v19), but sometimes they do. They do so whenever a person who has become a believer by faith continues to live by faith. Abraham is a good example of a believer whose good works (obedience to God) bore witness to his righteousness. He continued to live by faith, just as he had been declared righteous by faith. [Thomas Constable, [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com), James notes]

Why is it important that Constable states 20-30 years between Abraham's justification before God (Gen 15:6) and his faith becoming useful (justified before man, Gen 22)? Because it shows God's timing...Christians today see someone get saved and if that person has not completely cleaned up their act in a week or two, they surmise that their faith must not have been real. However, it took Abraham about 20 years to "clean up his act" and demonstrate his faith in God before man.

We want to see with our own eyes evidence of that person's salvation, otherwise we surmise that they may not truly be saved. We totally forget the Biblical reality that it took Abraham 20-30 years to clean up his act. Thus, we should give new believers some breathing room. God is at work in people's lives in ways we don't know about or can't see. It's an interesting question: If someone believes in Christ but does not have any good works to show for it, is that person really saved? This isn't even the question James is asking. Whether or not someone is saved is not the topic that James is addressing here. James assumes their faith is real, and is addressing the process that is necessary to move them from saving faith to serving faith.

22 **You** see that **faith** was working with his **works**, and as a result of the works, faith was **perfected**;

22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

22 You see that his faith worked together with what he did, and by his actions his faith was made complete.

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

- This verse has in view the God-designed reciprocity between faith (in the second tense of salvation) and works

— Faith in Christ and His finished work at Calvary has a divine goal: GROWTH! Works produced from faith move a believer toward God's goal—maturity—so that faith is "perfected" or "brought to its goal."

— James does not want his believing readers to ignore or be ignorant of the function that works play in this outworking of God's plan

- "You" - singular, referring to the imaginary person in v16,20...

- "...faith" [2x] - serving faith, not saving faith

- "...works" [2x] - a believer's good deeds

- "...perfected" - *teleioō*, aorist passive indicative, meaning "brought to maturity or completion"; "brought to its goal" (Cf. Heb 5:14); passive tense indicates it was God who brought Abraham's faith to its goal through this experience

— In the case of Abraham, 20-30 years later his works finally caught up with his faith. He no longer had just a saving faith, but he now had a serving faith. This is when Abraham's

faith was "perfected."

— This verse isn't saying that Abraham all of a sudden had faith in Gen 22 that he didn't have before; it is saying that Abraham's faith was working with his works in Gen 22, which justified him before man and "perfected" his faith (brought his faith to its goal).

— James is saying that Abraham's was justified by works, not before God, but before man  
— Abraham was not made right before God by his obedience; we're made right before God by faith in His Son, whose righteousness is transferred to us at the point of faith alone. His (and our) good works before God gained Abraham (us) nothing. Only faith in Christ gains us anything with God.

[Heb 5:14]

23 and the Scripture was **fulfilled** which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called a **friend of God**.

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

23 And so the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." And so he was called God's friend.

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

- "...fulfilled" - *plēroō*, to fill up; to make full; to consummate or complete; to carry into effect or bring to realization. The Scripture that was fulfilled is Gen 15:6, which is quoted here.

— The serving faith that Abraham demonstrated by offering Isaac "brought his justification" into effect or into realization. It demonstrated to men the unseen/invisible faith of Abraham, which he first exercised 20-30 years earlier when he was justified before God APART from/without works (Cf. Rom 4:1-5).

— Abraham was justified in the forensic sense (saved) solely by faith and not by works. James never says that works justify us before God. Paul does say that by faith without works, God justifies us.

- Abraham was justified by God in Gen 15:6, but he became a "friend of God" in Gen 18:17 (Cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Is 41:8)

— It wasn't until Gen 18:17 that Abraham was qualified to receive additional (prophetic) insight from God, related to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

- "...friend of God" - a believer who is obedient to God; there is a difference between being a believer and being a "friend" of God

— The distinction between believer and friend comes from Jesus in the Upper Room (John 15:14-15)

- Abraham was saved in Gen 15, became a friend of God in Gen 18 (an obedient believer) so God gave him prophetic insight into what He was going to do with Sodom and Gomorrah. Once Abraham became an obedient believer, he became entitled to additional insight. Simple faith gets you a ticket to heaven; being a "friend of God" gets you insight into God's plans: "**all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you**" (John 15:15b)
- You can have a ticket to heaven through faith alone in Christ alone, but not be a friend of God. All friends of God are believers, but not all believers are friends of God.
- What happens to the mind of an obedient believer, who grows into a friend of God? Their level of insight and understanding into the things of God increases dramatically. You begin to have insight into things that 5-10 years ago you knew nothing about.
- Take for example you're running a business. Who do you trust with the company secrets, the passwords, access to the bank account? The guy who started last week, or the guy who has shown himself to be a trustworthy and loyal employee for 15 years?
- God is not going to disclose additional insight to a believer who is not obedient to God because if we're disobedient with the little things, we'll be disobedient with the bigger things. So why should God trust a believer, who is not a friend, with insight?
- Once you understand this, you can rightly interpret passages like John 2:23-25

John 15:14-15:

- 14 **You are My friends if you do what I command you.**
- 15 **No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.**

- Jesus previously considered the disciples as "slaves" in the sense that they were without additional insight
- The disciples, who had been saved ~3 years prior, did not become "friends" of Christ until the Upper Room, just before the end of Jesus' ministry
- Why? Because it was at this point that they were willing to obey Him. And because they were willing to obey Him, He could trust them with additional revelation.
- Judas had already departed the room (John 13), so in this passage Jesus was addressing 11 saved people

24 **You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.**

24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

24 You observe that a person is justified through actions and not through faith alone.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

- "You" - plural, not singular, referring to the his audience ("brothers and sisters," v14), and us today, his readers
- "...justified" - *dikaioō*, used in the horizontal sense, before others; to be vindicated before men
- "...works" - a believer's moral deeds
- "...faith" - not saving faith but serving (second tense salvation) faith
- "...alone" - *monos*, modifies the verb "justified"; James is saying that a by-faith justification is not the only kind of justification that there is. There is also a by-works justification. If there was only one type of justification, James would not need to use the word "alone."
  - Justification by faith is before God; justification by works is before men
  - The use of *monos* as an adjective, which is the case for most English translations, expresses the view that justification does not occur by faith alone, but rather by faith and works. But this clashes with Paul's doctrine of justification by faith "alone."
  - The English renders *monos* as either an adjective or an adverb, however the Greek and Latin clearly convey that the word used here is an adverb, not an adjective
  - Advocates of the adjective view finesse the difficulty by saying that James knew that justification is by faith alone, but that the kind of faith that justifies is never alone. Faith alone is the basis for the person receiving eternal justification, but advocates of the view would deny that any workless person ever receives eternal justification. Another way of expressing this view is that both faith and works must be present for eternal justification, but God only takes into account faith when considering entrance into heaven.
  - In contrary to the adjective view, the adverb view (which is what the text actually says, and is supported in the original Greek) indicates that James speaks of two separate justifications. James already knows that his original readers understand that eternal justification occurs by faith alone (Cf. v23).
  - Gen 15:6 was true of Abraham before he had any works. It was also true well before he became a "friend of God" through obedience.
  - Since *monos* is adverbial, James does not see eternal justification by faith alone as the only type of justification. Abraham was justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar. This is not describing a justification without works, so it cannot be an eternal justification before God.
  - This means that there are two justifications:
    - A justification by faith alone in Christ alone (between man and God), when God declares man righteous based on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
    - A justification by works (between man and man) when man validates/vindicates his faith through his works

### Compare Rom 4:1-5 with James 2:21-24

Abraham matured into serving faith in the eyes of his fellow man. He was justified (declared righteous) in the eyes of *man* the moment he was willing to obey God's command to sacrifice Isaac. That was the time Abraham's saving faith became useful to God.

Translation: Through the example of Abraham, it is evident that a believer is justified before mankind by his good moral deeds, but that is not all. He is also justified before God, by faith.

The adverbial form of *monos* renders the meaning of this verse as: A man is justified by works, and not only justified by faith. Or, a man is not only justified by faith, but also by works.

### Two Unfortunate Interpretations

1. *Unproductive faith cannot save, because it is not genuine faith. Faith and works are like a two-coupon ticket to heaven. The coupon of works is not good for passage, and the coupon of faith is not valid if detached from works.* [Ryrie Study Bible, James 2:24]
2. We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. A true faith expresses itself and proves its existence by a life that glorifies God.

(d) Rahab and the spies (2:25)

25 **In the same way**, was Rahab the **prostitute** not **justified** by works also when she **received the messengers** and sent them out by another way?

25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

25 Likewise, Rahab the prostitute was justified through actions when she welcomed the messengers and sent them away on a different road, wasn't she?

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

- "In the same way" - James' second example of justification by works, this time of Rahab, teaches the same lesson as the first example (Abraham): just as Abraham was justified before man through his works, Rahab was justified before man through her works (Cf. Joshua 2:9-13).

— Rahab's treatment of the Israelite spies manifested before men her complete trust in God

- "...prostitute" - her profession prior to becoming a believer (Joshua 2:1; 6:17,22,25; Heb 11:31)

— The Hebrew word for "harlot" can have a wider meaning of "an innkeeper." However, the Greek word here and Heb 11:31 indicates an immoral person.

- Rahab was the opposite extreme from Abraham, a respected prominent patriarch: a Gentile, a prostitute, and a comparatively minor figure in the OT
- "...justified" - *dikaioō*, used in the same sense that James' used it in v24 regarding Abraham (Cf. Matt 12:37)
- "...received the messengers" - she welcomed and entertained her guests; she recognized the spies to be God's messengers to her and her family
- Her faith led her to commit treason against her own people, the Canaanites of Jericho
- Rahab likely had more confidence in the victory of the Israelites over her people, the Canaanites, than the Israelites had at that point in time.

[Joshua 2:9-13]

There's no doubt that Rahab was a believer, in the OT sense of the word, just like Abraham was in Gen 15:6. She was already justified (vertically) before God because she fulfilled the condition of faith alone. But when she stepped out and hid the spies, at risk to her own life, is when she was justified again (a 2nd time) before her fellow man (horizontally). The declaration of righteousness that she already possessed became practical.

Contrary to how Luther interpreted this passage, James is not saying that either Abraham or Rahab were made right with God through their good works. What he's saying is that both Abraham and Rahab were right with God before these events through faith, but now their faith became a useful faith through their good works. When our faith becomes useful, it typically results in blessings for other people and the usefulness of our faith is vindicated in the eyes of others.

(e) Body and its spirit (2:26)

- 26 For just as the body without *the spirit* is **dead**, so also faith without works is **dead**.
- 26 For just as the body without *the spirit* is dead, so also faith without works is dead.
- 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without actions is also dead.
- 26** For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.
- "...dead" [2x] - *nekros*, the word "dead" in Scripture always carries the idea of separation; synonyms include: useless, non-productive, good for nothing
- Contrary to the 21st century definition, the biblical definition of "dead" is never non-existence, but rather "separation" (see notes on v17)
- Physical death, biblically speaking, is when the soul and body are separated; the body goes into the ground, returning to dust, and the soul (of the Church Age believer) is immediately ushered into the presence of the Lord in heaven.
- What this verse is saying is that if I don't have works as a believer, my faith is useless, good for nothing, non-productive, separate from God's goals for saving me in the first place

- James is saying that saving faith without accompanying works are separate from God's purpose/goal and profitless to mankind: your faith is separate from your works, meaning your works are not done in faith. You have a saving faith but not a serving faith.
- Faith and works must be joined, not separated, in order for our saving faith to become our serving faith
- James' entire purpose for in this passage is not whether faith exists, but how that faith benefits both the possessor and other believers

## 10 Conclusions & Applications from James 2:14-26

1. It is possible to believe the gospel, hence be saved, yet not produce many, if any, visible good works.
2. But it is not possible to grow in the second tense of your salvation (sanctification, saved from the power of sin) without practicing what you believe, by faith.
3. Believers are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph 2:10).
4. Therefore, "good works" are both the production of divine good in the believer's life and a divine intent or goal of the new man, the new creation in Christ.
5. As a root produces fruit, so faith in Christ is to produce good works.
6. Faith is nourished and strengthened by good works; thus James says, "faith is brought to its goal by works (v22). There is a God-designed reciprocity between faith and good works.
7. Believers who verbalize the faith without following up with the production of good works are not Word doers (Cf. 1:22).
8. Believers who verbalize without being doers of the Word miss the saving/delivering qualities of God's design in good works. This reciprocity is expressed in v22.
9. Genuine believers do not produce good works at all times. There are lapses of good works with every believer throughout the course of their life. And there are even times that believers produce evil works. Therefore, to judge a person's salvation on the basis of his/her works (as Lordship Salvation does) is very dangerous and often misleading.
10. James and Paul are in complete agreement that faith in the forensic sense should result in good works, but a lack of good works is not necessarily cause to judge that one is saved or not. Who would judge that Lot was a saved man since all his recorded works were evil? Yet he was indeed justified/saved according to 2 Peter 2:6-7.

If you fail to see that James has two separate justifications in mind will forever have problems with this passage, and miss a tremendous blessing and instruction in how to live the Christian life. James' primary concern is the works that other people see in us, which exhibit a faith that cannot be seen. As with Abraham, men could see that he was a justified

man by his works, but these works had nothing to do with his actual justification before God and eternal destiny. Abraham was declared justified by God on the basis of faith alone without one shred of good works.

This passage (2:14-26) is a major contributor to the Lordship Salvation debate. See [Lordship Salvation](#) for a complete overview.



## Lewis Sperry Chafer

Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), vol. 7, 148.

"In its larger usage, the word faith represents at least four varied ideas: (1) As above, it can be personal confidence in God. This the most common aspect of faith may be subdivided into three features: (a) Saving faith, which is the inwrought confidence in God's promises and provisions respecting the Savior that leads one to elect to repose upon and trust in the One who alone can save. (b) Serving faith, which contemplates as true the fact of divinely bestowed gifts and all details respecting divine appointments for service. This faith is always a personal matter, and so one believer should not become a pattern for another. That such faith with its personal characteristic may be kept inviolate, ...



## Lewis Sperry Chafer

Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), vol. 7, 148.

“...the Apostle writes: “Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God” (Rom. 14:22). Great injury may be wrought if one Christian imitates another in matters of appointment for service. (c) **Sanctifying or sustaining faith**, which lays hold of the power of God for one’s daily life. It is the life lived in dependence upon God, working upon a new life-principle (Rom. 6:4). **The justified one, having become what he is by faith, must go ahead living on the same principle of utter dependence upon God.**”