**BOOK OF JAMES CHAPTER 2**

**JAMES 2:1-26**

Before we jump into James Chapter 2 I want to take about 10 minutes to discuss the differences between James and Paul. This has been the subject of a lot of debate by theologians and Bible scholars throughout church history. Some think that James and Paul have different theologies, contradict each other. However, I don’t see it that way at all.

*Discussing the differences between James and Paul*

The main theme of JAMES is that genuine faith in Christ will produce good works. If we’re truly saved our actions, our behavior will be different from those in the world. In Ch 2 James is going to talk a lot about that.

Last week, Chap 1 James established the importance of growing in our faith. He said the trials that God allows in our life serve a purpose, to strengthen and mature us. We grow in our faith when we see God at work in the tough times. As we come to Ch 2 it’s important to understand that the behavior God expects of us, what the Bible calls “good works,” is naturally produced in the life of a growing Christian. A person whose life is completely yielded to God, characterized by discipline, self-control and sound judgment, will exemplify godly behavior.

I’m going to read thru all of Chapter 2 then we’ll go back and discuss in more detail the key points James is making. As I’m reading this chapter is to write down any questions you have, specific verses to look at.

READ James 2:1-26 (with commentary)

1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory [don’t favor 1 person or group over another]. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? [so here James gives an example of showing favoritism] 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? 8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” [he quotes Lev 19:18, which Jesus also quoted] -- If you really fulfill the royal law you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but [you] DO murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty [a reference to the freedom we have in Christ that Paul talked about in Galatians – we are not under the Mosaic Law]. 13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment [we’re to show mercy and not to be judgmental toward others]. 14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? [this is the crux of the chapter, James asks 2 questions and we’ll talk about them]. 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? [again James gives an example of counterfeit faith – mere words without action]. 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works [faith and works go together, you can’t have the one without the other]. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder! [here James gives an obvious example of belief that is not saving faith. The demons believe in God. They know He’s real and they fear Him. But that belief is not saving faith] 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? [James is going to prove this statement from scripture] 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? [O.T. example of faith from Gen 22] 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” [Gen 15:6]--and he was called a friend of God [2 Chron 20:7, Isa 41:8]. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone [Abraham’s genuine faith, Gen 15, was demonstrated by his act of obedience to God, Gen 22]. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? [another example of faith from Joshua 2 when Rahab protected the Israelite spies at Jericho] 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

OK, so let’s go back and talk about this passage.

V 1 "Personal favoritism” or as the KJV says, “Respect of persons" is not a good thing. It implies a personal bias or prejudice. The Bible tells us that “God is not one to show partiality” (Acts 10:34). So if God doesn’t show favoritism, then as His people, we shouldn’t either. It’s a sin as we will see later in v 9. There is no place for prejudice in the life of a Christian. We need to treat all people as though they have value, which they do. Jesus died for them just as much as He died for you.

V 2-3 James’ example of showing favoritism takes place in the church house, “your assembly.” Surely this never happens in our church, does it? What’s the difference mentioned between these two men? Their clothes, their outward appearance. One man obviously has more money than the other. But this has nothing to do with what’s on the inside, the condition of each man's soul. So by judging merely on the external the people in the church James describes are no different from unsaved people in the world. First Samuel 16:7 reminds us that, "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." As Christians, we shouldn’t make superficial judgments based on outward appearances. We should strive to see people the way God sees them.

V 4 When James says believers have “become judges with evil thoughts” he’s saying that we often make outward appearance more important than inward character. There is a human tendency to want to identify ourselves with so-called successful people rather than people who appear to be failures. This is evil. Why? James goes on to gives 3 reasons why showing favoritism is wrong.

The first reason is that it is inconsistent with the ways of God, v 5.

So why is it that the poor, those who are often looked down upon by our society, are chosen by God? Consider the following:

The poor depend on God and not upon themselves

The poor have less distractions

The poor are not filled with pride, but tend to be humble given their present circumstances.

The inclusive gospel of Christ is especially dear to the poor because it includes those who have been otherwise ignored by society and gives value to those deemed by many as valueless.

The second reason why showing partiality is wrong is that it ignores that ALL have sinned, v 6-7.

The actions, the attitudes of certain rich men shows that they don’t deserve their favorable treatment. They haven’t done anything great or kind. In fact, v 7 tells us they gained their wealth at the expense of others and blasphemed the name of Christ. It’s wrong to exalt the very people who had been mistreating them. Instead they ought to see these rich men as they really are, as sinners in need of God's grace just like everyone else.

The third reason why partiality is sin is that it is inconsistent with the Word of God, v 8-9.

Some people that James knew about had argued that receiving these rich men was showing love for one's enemies (wow, that sounds so spiritual). But James doesn't buy that at all. He doubts that this is their true motive because of the lack of love these same church people have shown in their treatment of the poor man. Showing partiality is sin. There’s just no way to justify it before God.

V 10-11 James makes a case why there are no such things as “little” sins, not in God's eyes. If you break 1 law you’re guilty of the whole Law. All it takes is one little mess-up you’re as much a sinner as anyone else. How many banks do you have to rob to be considered a bank robber? Just one. OK, how many sins do you have to commit to be considered a sinner?

James now brings his thoughts on favoritism, partiality and prejudice to a close by giving us two practical principles to apply in our lives, v 12-13

Principle 1: Let God control how you think, speak and act, v 12

Don't use the way you were brought up or personal biases to control your behavior. Talk and act in a manner that pleases Jesus Christ. Live according to His Word, walk by the Spirit. The "law of liberty" as I mentioned before is the freedom we have in Christ. In Galatians 5:13 Paul said, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

Principle 2: Show mercy and love to others, v 13

Remember, it’s only by God's mercy that you and I are children of God. Since we’ve been forgiven, shown mercy, we should do the same to others. In Luke 6:36-37 Jesus taught us, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.”

An unbeliever, one who doesn’t know Christ judges, rejects, excludes, favors, condemns and uses others. But a Christ-like person, one who has a genuine faith, shows mercy, loves, accepts, includes, shows compassion toward and forgives others.

Someone once said that faith is like calories. You can't see them, but you can always see their results. And that’s the theme that resonates from the Book of JAMES – the results of faith. Basically James tells his readers, “If you say you believe, why do you act like you don’t?” In the verses we’re going to look at next, James emphasizes that true faith in Christ and good works go hand in hand. You cannot have one without the other.

V 14, James asks two different questions here. First, “What good does it do to say you have faith if you have no works to justify your claim?” Answer? None. So what good is a faith that does not produce works?

Then James asks a second and deeper question: “Can a faith that has no works attached to it save that person?” This cuts right to the chase. It’s a VERY important question. Three times in this chapter James says that faith without works is dead faith. It’s not real. It’s counterfeit. A counterfeit $20 bill may look like the real thing to the untrained eye, but it’s worthless.

The answer to the second question is a resounding NO! A faith without works is not truly faith and therefore it cannot save a person. Believing the right stuff is NOT saving faith. Believing a set of teachings, even good sound doctrine, is merely an intellectual assent. True faith, real faith, genuine faith permeates to the core and it changes a person. It changes their thoughts, their actions, their priorities, everything. Bottom line – a faith that does not produce godly, loving action is not genuine faith.

Now James gives us 3 marks of genuine faith. He shows us how we can recognize the real thing when we see it.

The first mark of genuine faith is that it is OUTWARDLY FOCUSED, v 15-16

James gives an example of counterfeit faith, that is, words without action. A needy person receives empty words rather than getting the help he really needs. Let’s say one of you comes up to me at Wal-Mart and says, “Hey, brother, I’m a bit strapped for cash right now and I need to buy some food for my family – just enough to get us through the next few days until I get paid. Can you help me out?” I look at you and with all my pious dignity I put my arm around you and say, “Hang in there, brother! It's not so bad. Things will get better. I’ll pray for you. See you Sunday!” Then I smile and walk away. What good would that do you? Do you get James’ point? If we’re truly saved then we can’t help but come to the aid of a brother or sister in need. We WILL care. We WILL take time out of our busy schedules to help. We WILL give out of the abundance that God has blessed us with. No questions asked.

I like what 1 John 3:17-18 says: “But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”

The second mark of genuine faith is that it is VISIBLE, v 17-18

What you do proves what you say you believe. What is faith by itself without works? James said it "is dead." Faith without works is not faith at all, but it is merely empty words. I can tell you all day long that I love my wife, but the way you know that I really do love my wife is not by my words but by how I treat her. If I don’t treat my wife in a loving manner (being thoughtful, kind, considerate, respectful, and so forth) then you would rightly conclude rightly that I don’t really love her. Our actions verify our faith in Christ because what we do on the outside shows who we are on the inside.

The final mark of genuine faith is that it is not intellectual but FROM THE HEART, v 19.

The demons and evil spirits intellectually believe in God. They know He is the one and only true God and they are well aware of what He can do. They have all the religious facts straight, but they do not have saving faith.

V 20, James drives this same point home. It is not my place or yours to judge whether or not a person who claims to have faith in Christ but has no works is saved or not. That’s not our job. Our responsibility is to examine our own selves. James tells us that a faith without works, with no action behind it, “is dead.” It is not true saving faith.

If a person claims to be saved but does not demonstrate godly actions then one of two possibilities exist: (1) They are saved and out of fellowship with God or (2) they are lost. If such a person really is saved, then, OK, they’ll escape hell. But they’re useless to God here on earth. God is not pleased with that kind of mediocre or dead Christianity. If they’re not saved, then it is important that they recognize their condition and do something about it.

James gives us two examples of genuine faith in action; one is Abraham and the other Rehab.

V 21-24, James uses the example of Abraham to demonstrate how his faith was characterized by action. Abraham was justified by a faith that went up to a mountain, built an altar, placed his son on the altar, and raised the knife with the intent of taking his son's life. He didn't just sit at home thinking about how wonderful God was and what God could do. He found out for himself! God had promised that through Isaac He would make a great nation out of Abraham. So Abraham KNEW that if that were to be so, God would have to perform a miracle such as raising Isaac from the dead (what the writer of Hebrews says). God DID perform a miracle that day and it made Abraham's faith even stronger than it was before.

V 25, James gives another example, this time of Rahab the harlot. She saved her life and that of her family by risking it. She protected the Israelite spies that had come to scope out Jericho. She didn't just encourage them. She put action to her words. She did something.

Last verse, v 26, Faith without works is like a body without the spirit. It’s stone cold dead! The fact is this old body is useless without my spirit to go with it and make it come alive. And so it is with us in a spiritual sense.