

Bible Study book of James Chapter 2

Week Two: Read James Chapter 2:1-26

1. The Sin of Partiality ([James 2:1–13](#))
2. Faith without Works Is Dead ([James 2:14–26](#))

Video [Chapter 2 Book of James](#)

I. Does Not Show Partiality (2:1–13)

a. The Command Against Favoritism (2:1–4)

- Do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.
- Example: Preferential treatment given to a rich person entering the assembly while a poor person is dishonored.
- Such favoritism makes one a judge with evil thoughts.

b. Reasons Not to Show Partiality (2:5–7)

- God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.
- The rich often oppress believers and blaspheme the noble name by which they are called.

c. The Royal Law and the Danger of Partiality (2:8–13)

- Fulfilling the royal law (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”) is good.
- Showing partiality is sin and makes one a transgressor of the law.
- Whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point is guilty of all.
- Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.
- Judgment without mercy will be shown to the one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

[2:1–7](#) James repeatedly addresses the recipients of his letter as “brothers and sisters.” This address does more than signal a transition to a new paragraph. It reminds the recipients of James’s affection for them as well as his shared filial status, something that obligates him to the same obedience and love that he commands. James begins this new section by informing these early Christians that there is only one worthy of special treatment: the glorious Lord Jesus Christ. People show sinful partiality based on many characteristics (personal appearance, race, biological kinship, etc.), but here James focuses on one of the most common types of favoritism: giving special treatment to the wealthy, which is really lightly

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veiled self-exaltation. James imagines a situation in which a Christian fawns over a wealthy visitor to the church meeting (also translated “synagogue”) while at the same time directing a poor visitor to a lowly seat on the floor. Even modern Christians must be wary of showing partiality toward the wealthy through either formal actions (e.g., favoring the rich for leadership positions in the church) or informal behavior (e.g., inviting for lunch only more well-heeled visitors). By favoring the wealthy, James warns, people implicitly set themselves up as wicked judges, practicing sinful discrimination. Although the world looks down on the poor, God has a special concern and care for them. A poor person’s continual state of need can lead them, under the Holy Spirit’s empowerment, to look to God for their daily provision in a way that truly honors their Creator. The person is poor in the eyes of the world but is rich in faith. How wrong, then, for God’s people to disparage those with whom God is pleased! James also notes how foolish it is to fawn over the very people who are exploiting us (v. [6](#)). In the context of James’s addressees, rich landowners were perhaps loaning money to small farmers and then using the courts to pounce on their land in a year of bad crops. It’s not clear if these rich non-Christians were verbally blaspheming God or only implicitly doing so through evil behavior and rejection of the gospel. It’s not difficult to think of modern parallels. Some religious leaders court the cultural and political elite, reveling in their “connections” or “influence” while ignoring the blasphemies of those to whom they show public partiality. And, in the end, what real benefit do these religious leaders gain by their flattery?

C. The Royal Law and the Danger of Partiality (2:8–13)

- Fulfilling the royal law (“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”).
- Showing partiality is sin and makes one a transgressor of the law.
- Whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point is guilty of all.
- Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.
- Judgment without mercy will be shown to the one who has shown no mercy; **mercy triumphs over judgment.**

[2:8–13](#) James continues his arguments against favoritism toward the rich. Obeying the Scripture to “love your neighbor as yourself” ([Lev 19:18](#)) demands that one love both rich and poor alike. James cites this command as coming from “the royal law”—implying that impartial love of neighbor should be the pattern of life in the kingdom of God, as inaugurated and taught by Jesus himself ([Mk 12:30–31](#)). A person showing partiality toward the rich may be inclined to dismiss their

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behavior as a minor offense alongside God's other "more important" laws. Such self-defense is just as ridiculous as someone claiming, "Hey, all I did was murder someone. I didn't commit adultery or anything!" By using the example of murder, James may also be implying that to mistreat and exploit a poor person over time could lead to their actual death (e.g., through starvation). **There is a day of judgment coming, and the way we treat others, especially showing mercy to the poor, reveals whether we ourselves have truly experienced the mercy of God** (cf. [Mt 18:32–35](#)).

II. Shows Faith Through Works (2:14–26)

a. Faith Without Works Cannot Save (2:14–17)

- What good is it if someone claims to have faith but has no works? Can that faith save him?
- Example: Telling a brother or sister who lacks clothing and daily food to "go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them what is needed.
- Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

b. Faith Is Demonstrated by Works (2:18–19)

- Someone may say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works.
- Even the demons believe that God is one—and shudder.

[2:14–19](#) Verse [14](#) opens what is probably the best-known portion of James's letter (vv. [14–26](#)), both because it pointedly summarizes James's main theme (obedience or spiritual consistency) and because it has been a source of controversy since the time of Martin Luther (1483–1546), who suggested that it was impossible to reconcile the writings of Paul and James. The writings of Paul and James are in fact complementary. Paul attacks legalism, which wrongly teaches that a person can earn their acceptance before God by good works. Paul says that a person is justified (i.e., set in right relationship with God) solely on the basis of faith in Jesus ([Gal 2:16](#)). James, on the other hand, attacks nominalism. A person's claim to be in right relationship with God is tested by their way of life. A person is *shown* to be righteous by their deeds. Just as empty words are no comfort to the physically needy Christian brother or sister, so an empty profession of faith is dead and useless ([Jas 2:14–17](#)). Faith and deeds are not separate "gifts" so that a Christian may have one but not the other (v. [18](#)). Genuine Christian faith inevitably produces deeds and gives evidence of saving faith. Simply professing monotheism without having a life

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that shows submission to God demonstrates a demonic faith (v. [19](#)). In fact, the demons' faith may be "superior" in that they have some visible response—shuddering at their coming judgment! The apostle Paul likewise affirms that genuine Christian faith must result in a changed lifestyle (e.g., [Gal 5:6,19–21](#)).

c. Faith Without Works Is Dead – Illustrated (2:20–26)

- Do you want to be shown that faith without works is useless?
- **Abraham:** Justified by works when he offered Isaac on the altar. Faith was active along with his works and was completed by them. Scripture was fulfilled: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness," and he was called a friend of God.
- A person is justified by works and not by faith alone.
- **Rahab the prostitute:** Justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.
- As the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

[2:20–26](#) James continues his argument that faith without works is dead. He does not say there are two kinds of genuine faith—one with works and one without. There is only living faith (which has works) or dead faith (which doesn't). James appeals to two Old Testament figures—one Jewish male, one Gentile female—as Scriptural proofs and practical examples that genuine faith shows itself in deeds. Abraham didn't just say he believed God; he obeyed God by offering his son Isaac on the altar (v. [21](#); [Gen 15:6](#); [22:1–18](#)). Similarly, Rahab the prostitute didn't just privately believe in the God of Israel in her heart; she risked her life to support the Israelite spies who followed this only true God ([Jas 2:25](#); [Jos 2:1–15](#); [Heb 11:31](#)).

Resources

NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible

[TGC Knowing the Bible: James](#)

[Bible Gateway Book of James](#)

Life Lessons From James by Max Lucado

NIV Application Bible