

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

JAMES LESSON 2 (Chapter 2)

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Timothy Sparks and Ben Bailey.

Timothy Sparks:

“My brothers do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality” (Jas. 2:1). I’m Timothy Sparks.

Ben Bailey:

And I’m Ben Bailey. Welcome to our study of the Book of James. Today’s lesson is being brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The church of Christ in your area would be happy for you to stop in and pay them a visit. If you would like to study the Bible, they would be glad to assist you. These are people who love God’s Word, who respect the authority of the Bible, and who want to help you in any way they can. We, too, want to be of assistance. We are making available all of our lessons on CD or DVD. If you would like to have a copy of today’s lesson, or any of our other lessons, simply log on to our website at www.thegospelofchrist.com, fill out the request form you will find there, and we will send you what you need. We also are making available by mail a four-lesson Bible correspondence course that you can complete in the convenience of your own home, on your own time. Taking this course can help you understand the Bible. At the end of the course, we will send you a certificate of completion to document your efforts.

Timothy Sparks:

In chapter 2, James is going to tell us **not** to be people of partiality. God Himself is not a God of partiality, as Peter pointed out when he said, “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34-35). James is stressing that same concept. He tells us, for example, that whenever people enter the worship assembly, we shouldn’t show respect to a person who is rich, as opposed to someone who is poor. We shouldn’t despise a brother or sister just because he or she happens to be poor. We shouldn’t say to the rich person, just because of their financial status, “Sit here in a place of honor.” James is addressing those who might say to a poor brother or sister, “You sit here at my footstool.” This type of attitude would show partiality. It would show prejudice. One of the best definitions I’ve heard of prejudice is, “failing to see souls as God sees them.” When we fail to see souls as God sees them, we have become judges with evil thoughts. We are not seeing as God sees. As we learn from the Old Testament, God does not look at the outward appearance. Rather, He looks upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). God doesn’t look at how rich or poor a person is. He doesn’t look at a person’s skin color. He doesn’t care if a person is married or single. God doesn’t revere someone just because he’s married or because

she's single. God is looking at the person's heart. That is what James is saying. When we don't see as God sees, we are showing partiality or prejudice. We then have become a respecter of persons, and that is not right.

Ben Bailey:

James asks, "Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich, and heirs of the kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him?" (2:5). Oftentimes, it seems to be easier for a poor person to see the wealth of the spiritual things that God has provided, and to focus on Heaven. They may be missing a lot here and now, but they can see that they one day will have all of God's riches in Heaven. In verses 6 and 7, James says, "Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?" His point is that those who were partial to rich people were doing the opposite of what was logical. It was the rich people who were dragging Christians into court to accuse them of things they hadn't done. So James says, "Not only is what you're doing **wrong**, but it's also **illogical**. It doesn't fit the standard that even you, yourself, recognize." Then, in verse 8 he says, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture—'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'—you do well." He said, "If you do this, you do well, but if you don't, you commit sin." What is it like to be prejudiced or partial? Is it "just another way of looking at things"? No. Being prejudiced, partial, or biased is a sin. It is something that causes us to miss the mark that God set. When we do that, we fall out of God's grace. It all goes back to the royal law that God set forth for His people in the Book of Deuteronomy and other places. We must love our neighbor as ourself. Jesus tells us who our neighbor is. In Luke 10, we have the story of the good Samaritan. The man went along the road, and he saw a fellow who was in need. Jesus, in answering the question, "Who is my neighbor?," says that anybody who is in need is my neighbor. We are all in need in different ways, and so anybody that we can help might be our neighbor. We must learn to love others in the way that God loves us. This type of love is sacrificial—i.e., it causes us to look to the best interests of others. We do not base our feelings and actions on outward appearances, or on how much money someone may have, but on the realization that the person possesses an immortal soul, that God loves that person, and that Christ died for that person.

Timothy Sparks:

We learn from this passage that the phrase, "that noble name by which you are called," is actually a reference to the name "Christian." The name that the rich people were blaspheming was "Christian." Notice also James 2:8, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well." James is saying that if observe the teaching of Leviticus 16:18 to love our neighbor as ourselves, we do well. On the other hand, if we show partiality, then we sin. We become a transgressor of the law, and stand convicted of such. This is not good, because as James points out, "Whoever keeps the whole law, but is guilty in one point, he becomes guilty of all" (2:10). Whatever else we do, we **must** abide by the royal law of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus Himself said that the first and great commandment is "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your might" (Mt. 22:37-39). Then, He said that the second is like unto it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." In Leviticus 19:18, we find a very valuable lesson about loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Ben Bailey:

It all goes back to the Golden Rule that Jesus set forth in Matthew 7:12. We must do unto others as we would want them to do unto us. In fact, James says, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (Jas. 2:12). In the next verse, he tells us why: “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (vs. 13). We must speak, and live our lives, as those who are going to be judged by a law of liberty—i.e., the law that sets us free, the law of freedom in Christ Jesus. If this is a law of freedom (and it is!), why should we bind it up with our own prejudice, our own bias, and our own partiality? If it’s a law of freedom, let’s allow **all** people be free in the sight of God, and not invent social status, political status, or status based on wealth. If it’s a law of freedom, then let’s live our lives by that law. James gives us the reason why we should do so. If we do not show mercy, mercy will not be shown to us. Yet mercy triumphs over judgment. The idea of mercy triumphing over judgment does not mean that if there are things in your life that are not right, yet you are a merciful person, your mercifulness is going to allow you to escape God’s judgment for your sins. That’s not what he’s talking about. He’s talking about how the attitude by which you judge people is going to be the attitude by which God judges you. If you’re merciful and forgiving, God is going to be merciful and forgiving toward you. But if you are not merciful, if you are biased and prejudiced, then why should God treat you any differently? Imagine the following scene, which takes place in a local congregation. Two people walk in. One man has just gotten off work. He has been working 10 to 12 hours a day in order to pay his bills and make sure that his family is fed. He’s dirty. He has holes in his jeans. His hair is not well combed. But he loves the Lord. He comes in at the same time as a rich man with a 3-piece suit, fancy shoes, and expensive rings on the fingers of both hands. Which person are you going to treat “best”? Someone says to the rich man, “You come down front; we have a special place reserved for you.” They may be thinking in the back of their mind, “He’s likely to be a big giver, and he’s going to help the church financially.” But someone says to the poor man, “If you just stay here in the corner, don’t touch anybody, don’t get them dirty, and don’t bother anybody, we’ll let you worship with us.” That’s prejudice. That’s bias. That’s showing partiality. We ought to treat all people equally, because that is what God would have us do.

Timothy Sparks:

In James 2:14-26, James offers a discussion about faith and works. He makes it clear that faith without works is worthless. It is of no profit for a person to say that he has faith when he has no works. Can such a faith save that person? Can a dead, hollow, shallow faith save a person if he does not have the works that should accompany true faithfulness? James’s whole point is, “You are not saved by mere mental assent. You cannot be saved by faith alone.” As an example, James says, “If a brother or sister is destitute and in need of food and clothing, and you say, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ is that true faith? Basically, you’ve just said, ‘Go your way. I sure do hope things work out for you. Good luck.’ You have not done anything to help. You haven’t put your faith into action. You have no works to back up your faith. Have you been pleasing to God? Is that the kind of faith God wants you to have?” James’ answer is, “Absolutely not!” James stresses three different times that faith without works is dead, and provides some illustrations to tell us quite pointedly that **we must have faith accompanied by works**.

Ben Bailey:

James foresees someone saying, “You’ve got faith, I’ve got works, what’s the big deal? My gift is faith, and your gift is works.” Because he saw that problem coming, he said, “You show me your faith **without** your works, I’ll show you may faith **by** my works.” The point is, can you show someone you’re a faithful child of God without ever doing any kind of works as a Christian? Suppose someone says to you, “I’m a Christian.” You might say, “How do I know that? I can’t just take your word on it. I’ve got to see some evidence; I can’t just believe everything everybody says.” How do we show someone we are a Christian? There are a number of ways we can do that, but one of them is by showing them the kind of life we live—as evinced by the works we accomplish on Christ’s behalf. James is saying, “You cannot show your faith without your works. You can’t just **say** you’re a Christian; you’ve got to prove it by the things you do.” You cannot be a child of God, and not act on Christ’s behalf by carrying out good works. Maybe people can tell you are a Christian by your language. Maybe they can tell by the modest attire you wear. Maybe they can tell by your studying and reading your Bible, and the good things that you do when you go to worship with the saints. There are things people **do** that identify them with the faithful, but you just can’t say, “I’ve got faith, you’ve got works. That’s my gift; and that’s your gift.” Faith and works are inseparably linked. You can’t have just works. You also must have faith to back it up. But you can’t have just faith, either; you must have works to show that you are faithful.

Timothy Sparks:

James goes on to say, “You believe that there is one God, You do well. The demons believe and tremble” (Jas. 2:19). Demons believe that there is one God. Yet, the kind of faith they possess isn’t going to save them. During Jesus’ earthly ministry, demons did more than believe. They also confessed. They would say to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” So they believed and they confessed. But did their belief and confession of Christ save them? No. Why not? Because they did not have the works that made their faith genuine. They did not have true obedience. James is stressing the type of complete and absolute faithfulness that makes us love our neighbor as ourselves, and that causes us to seek another person’s best interests. In verse 20, James says, “But do you want to know, O foolish person, that faith without works is dead?” James is trying to reinforce his point. He mentions it in verse 17, “Faith without works is dead.” He repeats himself in verse 20, “Faith without works is dead.” He stresses it a third time in verse 26, “Faith without works is dead.” Why do some in the religious world teach that we are saved by faith alone? James makes it very clear, “You are **not** saved by faith alone!” In fact, if you look at the New Testament, you will not find that any **one** thing is said to save us. We are not saved by grace only. We are not saved by hope only. We are not saved by baptism only. We are not saved by repentance only. Rather, we are saved by a number of things in conjunction with one another. We are saved by our belief, but not by belief only. We are saved by repentance, but not by repentance only. We are saved by confession, but not by confession only. We are saved by baptism, but not by baptism only. We are saved by walking in the light and continuing in the grace of God. Considering the way that James stresses how we are **not** saved by “faith only,” how could anyone come to the Bible for justification of the concept of “salvation by faith only”? If we were saved by faith only, then that would exclude the grace of God, as well as His mercy. James’ point is that a faithful Christian has to be one who exhibits good works in his life. James is not talking about us “earning” or “meriting” our salvation. Some people come to this passage in James and say, “If you say that you’re saved by works, then you’re talking about a meritorious system in which you ‘earn’ your salvation.” That is not true. As a matter of fact, Paul addressed that in Ephesians 2 8-10 when he noted that

we are saved “by grace through faith.” This indicates faithfulness. We are “saved by grace through faithfulness, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast, for we are His workmanship, created in Christ for good works.” Obviously, Paul and James are not contradicting one another, since they both were under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit, which aided them as they wrote down the Word of God infallibly. The truth is, Paul and James are in complete harmony. Paul is saying that although we must have works, they are not the kinds of works that allow us to merit or earn our salvation. James is saying that if we don’t have the same kinds of works that Paul addressed—works that show we are faithful—then we are not going to be saved.

Ben Bailey:

Conditional works and meritorious works are not in opposition to each other. In fact, they go together hand in hand. Paul, in the Book of Romans, is talking about the Jews who thought that because they were the children of Abraham, because they had offered sacrifices and paid tithes, God “owed” them salvation. That would be salvation based upon meritorious works. But Paul said that those kinds of works will never save anyone. James is talking about conditional works, not meritorious works. Conditional works are those things I must do to receive the free gift of salvation that God has given me. It’s like any gift that someone wants to give you. Suppose someone puts a hundred-dollar bill in front of you and says that they are willing to give it to you—free. You still have to walk up to that hundred-dollar bill, pick it up, and put it in your pocket. Those are conditions you had to meet to receive the gift. It was a free gift, but you still had to go through several different steps to get the gift. The same is true in regard to salvation. In fact, one of the great proofs of the inspiration of the Bible is that, long before people invented various false doctrines, the Bible had already defeated those doctrines. Look at James 2:24 as a prime example: “We see then that a man is justified by works, and not faith only.” Underline that in your Bible. The only time the words “faith only” occur in the Bible is when the Bible states the exact opposite of what many religions are promoting today. Many of our religious friends say, “We are saved by faith only.” But the Bible says that we are **not** saved by faith only. “Faith only” is a doctrine that applies to demons (Jas. 2:19, “The demons believe and tremble”), but are demons going to be saved? Of course not! Why not? Because they did not do more than merely “believe.” The concept of salvation by faith only is a doctrine that comes straight from the devil himself. The kind of faith God wants us to have is not “faith only,” but faith combined with conditional works. Such works do not earn salvation for us, but are things we must do to be pleasing to the God of Heaven. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” Those people believed in Jesus, and were willing to call Him “Lord.” But that was not enough. Jesus said that those who **do** the will of the Father are the ones who will be saved. Jesus is the author of salvation to all those who **obey** Him. In the Book of Romans, faith is emphasized as “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Such faith is obedient trust in God. So, while many promote the idea of “salvation by faith only,” we see from the example of Abraham, the example of Rahab, and numerous others (Hebrews 11) that those people had to **do** things to be pleasing to God. Abraham had to be willing to sacrifice Isaac before he was pleasing to God. He did something! Rahab had to hang a rope outside her window as evidence of her faithfulness to the Lord. She, then, was justified by works, not merely by saying “I believe there’s a God, and that He will save me.” James 2 beautifully illustrates the inseparable link between faith and works.

Timothy Sparks:

From James 2:21-23, we learn that Abraham was justified when he offered his son Isaac as a sacrifice. James asked the question, “Was he not justified by works?” Then we learn (as he quotes from Genesis 15:6) that “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” When it says that Abraham “believed God,” does this mean that Abraham simply said, “Lord, I believe you are going to fulfill your promises, but I’m not going to do anything about that”? No. Abraham possessed more than just a “mental acceptance” of what God said. He **acted** on his belief regarding what God said. He offered Isaac upon the altar. Of course, Isaac wasn’t literally sacrificed, but in Abraham’s mind, he had followed through on the commandment of God—which is why God stayed Abraham’s hand and did not allow him to kill his son. Yet because Abraham believed God (i.e., he acted on God’s command), he was accounted as righteous. Then it says that Abraham was called “the friend of God” (Jas. 2:23).

Are you the friend of God today? You will be if you do what God tells you to do. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (Jn. 14:15). He also said, “You are my friends if you do whatever I say” (Jn. 15:14). We **can** be the friend of God. We can be people of faithfulness, just as Abraham as a man of faithfulness. In the case of Abraham, his faith was active—through his works; thus, he was justified. James also uses another illustration of the body and spirit when he says, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith if it does not have works is dead also” (Jas. 2:26). If you go to a funeral, you see the body, but the spirit is not there. That person’s spirit has departed. It has been entrusted to the hands of the living God, to the One Who is the receiver of our spirits (Eccl. 12:7). When the spirit departs, the body is just a shell, just a corpse. James is saying, “Just as a body without a spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.” James has stressed, in the strongest possible language, that we must have both faith **and** works. God loves us. He wants us to be His faithful children. He wants us to be His friends. If we do what He tells us, then we can be. In the Book of James, we see the common sense that is associated with Christianity. We also see true wisdom. May we come to the Book of James and decide to be “doers of the Word, and not hearers only” (Jas. 1:22).

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR JAMES LESSON 2 (CHAPTER 2)

1. Explain James' statement, "My brothers do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality" (Jas. 2:1).
2. Explain what had happened in the Book of Acts (and in what chapter it is recorded) to make Peter say, "I perceive that God shows no partiality."
3. Explain the connection between James 2:1-8 and 1 Samuel 16:7.
4. Explain, in the context of James 2:1-8, it was both wrong and illogical for Christians to cater to the rich.
5. James used the phrase "the noble name by which you are called" (Jas. 2:7). To what did he have reference?
6. What is "the royal law of Scripture"?
7. Explain the meaning of the following passage from James 2:13, "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment."
8. Explain what the passage in James 2:13 does **not** mean.
9. The lesson provided a definition of prejudice. What is that definition?
10. What is wrong with a Christian saying to someone who needs clothing or food, "Be warmed and filled"?
11. There are two things listed in James 2 that are "inseparably linked." What are they?
12. What was the point that James was stressing in James 2:17, 20, and 26?
13. James observed that even demons believe in God and Christ. Since John 3:16 and other verses point out that those who believe in Christ will be saved, why, then, are the demons not saved?
14. Explain the difference between "meritorious" works and "conditional" works.
15. What is the meaning of Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8-9 ("For by grace have you been saved by faith")?
16. This lesson discusses briefly one of the "great proofs of the Bible's inspiration." What is that proof?
17. What is meant by "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26)?
18. Why did Abraham receive the designation "the friend of God"?
19. What justified Abraham, according to James 2:21-23?