

CCF Study Notes
Tuesday 7 AM Study
17 October 2006
James 2

Before beginning to read from James let us spend time in prayer, considering the victory which God gives through faith in Jesus Christ. Let us ask God to help us to do the following:

1. **See and act** toward others around us from the context of our faith is our Lord Jesus Christ,
2. **Remember** that God chooses and defends the poor,
3. **Fulfill** the royal law,
4. **Have faith** that works,
5. **Pass** the tests of faith that God puts in our way,
6. **Remember** that not our sinful past but our present works of faith lead to justification, and
7. **Have** a vibrant, living faith that is demonstrated daily by the works of faith.

What are the signs of true faith? How do we know if we are still walking by faith in Jesus Christ? How do we know if our path is leading toward eternal life? In this chapter we are shown some things that are incompatible with such faith. A general principle is set out showing how such faith would color all of our relationships here on earth. Our righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ. The evidence of that faith is our obedience to God's commands. Our past track record isn't the issue. Are we living by faith now? If we see the our faith is active and living, we know that we are on our way to eternal life. Does your faith pass muster? Each person must examine their own heart, and their own conduct.

(2:1-4) When people of wealth, power or prestige get special treatment in the body of Christ there is a problem. The problem is that we are judging people by externals. Our culture is hung up on the external trappings of prosperity: fast cars, big houses, fancy clothing, refined words, and general fashion-sense. We reveal our own evil thoughts when we judge such people worthy of better treatment. We demonstrate that we value people in terms of what they have to offer us – instead of in terms of God's love for them. There should be no partiality. God loves all His children equally and pays the full price to save each one. Each one is equally a part of God's inheritance. How might this principle change the way we raise money in the church?

(2:5-7) James speaks to his beloved brethren. He presses home the point that God has chosen the poor of this world as heirs by faith of His heavenly kingdom. We must not dishonor those whom God has chosen. We must not honor those who dishonor God by their way of life. Peter goes further and commands that we honor all people. (I Peter 2:17) The issue is not so much that we honor some people, but that we dishonor some whom God has chosen. Notice a key description of those poor whom God has chosen: they are "rich in faith". We measure wealth in the wrong terms. Strong faith in Jesus Christ is the greatest wealth that any man could have. Are you poor or are you wealthy? If you are rich in faith, if you are an heir to the kingdom of God, then you are wealthy indeed!

(2:8-13) The royal law is set out for us here: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This summarizes the whole of what the law says about how we relate to other people here on earth. We cannot claim to be keeping this law if we are dishonoring some people in our midst. If you have broken the law in one way, you have broken the whole law in the sense that the royal law has been broken. The issue of treating the wealthy, powerful or prestigious people differently -- as for the purpose of raising money, for instance -- is no merely a peripheral issue. It is a central issue. And love requires that we show great mercy, not giving people what we may think they deserve from our human perspective, but that which they deserve as vessels of God's mercy. When we show no mercy toward others we are shown no mercy by God. In this way our mercy triumphs over the judgment that we might otherwise deserve. In this way we are judged fitting vessels for God's mercy.

(2:14-17) Faith is not some abstract idea, or warm fuzzy feeling inside, or even a magic formula that we recite. No! Faith that profits a man responds to the needs of others. Faith allows us to share whatever we have with others. Otherwise our faith is useless to others and useless to ourselves as well. A faith in Jesus Christ that does not somehow shape our conduct is a faith that will not find salvation in Jesus Christ. If Jesus is not our Lord, He is not our Savior either. How is your faith in Jesus Christ serving to alter your behavior?

(2:18-24) This section can be very confusing. Two things are spoken against here. First, it is not possible to do the works of faith without having faith. This speaks to those who might believe that somehow they can obtain salvation by simply doing good works. No! The works James is talking about here are those that flow out of our faith. Second, James is saying that the works of faith necessarily point to the faith that is behind them. Abraham's faith led him to obey God in seeking to sacrifice Isaac. His act of faith pointed to the underlying faith which God accounted to Abraham as righteousness. In this sense a man is justified by works, and not faith alone: Genuine faith will always produce in us the works or fruit of faith. The point is that there is no place of complacency – not in the matter of our faith or in the matter of our works! Yet many lukewarm Christians have grown complacent today.

(2:25) James looks to a more extreme example – that of Rahab the harlot. Rahab didn't earn her life by her good works or her stellar reputation, but by a single act of faith – by hiding the spies. Even in hiding the spies, Rahab lied to the leaders of Jericho. Yet hers was counted as an act of faith. And Rahab encouraged faith in the spies and in all of Israel. Notice that in Rahab we connect together the three ideas of this chapter – partiality, mercy, and the works of faith.

(2:26) By faith we look for eternal life in Jesus Christ. But if our faith shows no fruit in our lives there is a serious question as to whether our faith in Jesus Christ will do us any good. It is important to remember that we are talking about the works of faith – no merely good works. Sometimes the works of faith look distinctly different from those "good works" men use to try to earn their salvation. Is our faith a living faith? How do we know that?

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