

James 2 Notes

Partiality (2:1-13)

- The command (2:1).
 - To say that practicing favoritism contradicts one's profession of faith is another way of saying that one's action does not measure up to the truth one professes to believe. It furthermore shows that one does not practice "pure and undefiled religion."
 - The stress on Christ as One of "glory" heightens the inconsistency of allowing partiality and discrimination to be associated with faith in such an exalted person as Christ. Said another way, to hold Jesus in proper respect as Lord necessitates the right attitude toward men.
 - "Partiality" means "to lift up the face of someone" or to "receive him with favor" (cf. Malachi 1:8; Leviticus 19:15; Psalm 82:2). God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34; Galatians 2:6; Romans 2:11; 1 Peter 1:17).
- The conduct (2:2-3).
 - The word for "assembly" is "synagogue." Even after leaving the synagogue, Jewish Christians no doubt continued to refer to their church meeting as a "synagogue."
 - The rich man is shown special attention or "respect" simply because of his station in life. The poor man has "vile" raiment. The figurative use of this word for moral uncleanness is found in Revelation 22:11.
 - Letting a visitor stand rather than providing a seat (even if some member has to stand) is a mark of discourtesy among most people. To have to sit on the floor at someone's feet is equally a slight, unless it is voluntary submission of the student to his teacher.
- The consequences (2:4-13).
 - The word translated "partial" is built on the same root as the word for "judges." In so judging between people, the readers had become unjust judges. Their actions represent a vacillation, either of a group among its members or of individuals in consistency or inner approval of a course of action.
 - In making distinctions on outward appearances they were judging (cf. Matthew 7:1). Only God is qualified to judge; even when we see evidence of evil deeds, human judgments are less than perfect.
 - Their favoritism is both inconsistent with God's attitude toward the poor and also with the attitude of the rich themselves toward God's people. Of the two visitors to the service, the poor one is much more likely to become a Christian and become an heir of the heavenly kingdom.

- James seems to anticipate that some of his hearers will justify their showing favor to the rich by referring to the commandment which said that the Jew was to love his neighbor as himself. It may be that James knew that this was already being used as an excuse. He shows that such an attempt fails as a justification of the action on the grounds that it falls short of fulfilling the whole law.
- They committed sin when they showed partiality because partiality was condemned in the same chapter which speaks of love of neighbor (Leviticus 19:15, 18). By an appeal to the law, nothing but sin can be made of their action toward the poor.
- The keeping of the whole law is useless as a matter of justification unless it is kept perfectly. "He is guilty of all" means to become guilty of violating the law as a whole -- of becoming a lawbreaker (Galatians 3:10). James is not saying that the law is still binding upon Christians as such; he is answering those who appeal to the law of love to justify their sin. This is clear from vs. 12.
- Remembering the free yoke which we have assumed to the will of Christ, out of gratitude which we owe to Him, we ought to act toward the poor as that law of love (freely assumed and no longer a burden of law) indicates that we should. Our judgment as Christians will not be as a matter of law but as a matter of obedience to this law of liberty.
- Mercy "glories" or "boasts" against the threat of judgment because it leaves the judgment with nothing to condemn. The man who has loved the poor and has shown mercy toward them will be justified in the last judgment and will receive the blessing of Christ.

Faith And Works (2:14-26)

- The inquiry (2:14).
 - James begins his refutation of the erroneous idea that faith can save without works by pointing up the issue sharply with a series of questions in order to state his fundamental position that faith which does not result in works is vain, just as religion which is not lived out is vain (1:27).
 - By "works" James means any obedience to the law of Christ as a Christian, but generally the term refers to "good deeds" or "conduct," the fruits of the Christian life (Matthew 5:16; 23:3; John 3:20; Romans 2:6).
- The illustration (2:15-17).
 - James emphasizes in a strong and concrete way the necessity of the "work" of faith. Faith expressed in word only would be worthless. There are many who say and do not, just as there are many who look into the "perfect law of liberty" and do not obey it.

- The illustration is then applied to the contention. Just as the answer to the needy man without deeds of charity would be profitless, so also faith if it has no works is useless or without value.
- The indoctrination (2:18-26).
 - Faith is demonstrable only through works. It is useless to have faith if it does not express itself in obedience. The man who professes the faith of Christ and really works at the job of producing fruits to the name of Christ will never be doubted as being a sincere Christian.
 - James does not despise faith. If a Christian lets his faith do for him what it should, he is on his way to salvation. If not, then he is no better than the demons. "Demons" were evil spirits under the service of Satan. "Shudder" means "to bristle," but it simply speaks of one who stands in awe or reverence (Daniel 7:15). It may here refer to the demons' fear of impending punishment.
 - It is certainly possible that James brings up Abraham because the Jews felt that being a descendant of Abraham or an orthodox believer was sufficient for salvation. James does not speak of Abraham's entire life, but the one act of offering Isaac (Genesis 22:9-14).
 - Acts of obedience led Abraham to a declaration of righteousness before God. The act or "works" is shown to be the basis of his justification. This is not to say that his works alone saved him. James mentions only what has been left out or neglected by some. The two worked together.
 - Paul and James use the word "justify" in the same sense (although talking about a different occasion of declaration of righteousness). But a contradiction is avoided by seeing that they used "works" differently. Paul is using the word in the sense of works of the law of Moses providing justification (Galatians 2:16; 3:11; 5:4). He insists that Abraham's justification was before the law and apart from it, just as he insisted that it was before circumcision. James is using it in the sense of works of faith or obedience. Paul had spoken of works of obedience growing out of one's faith in God or Christ being the basis of justification (Romans 1:5; 16:26; Galatians 5:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Titus 3:5-8).
 - Abraham's faith was not perfected or completed so that it did for him what God had intended it to do until after his obedience. Faith and works give each other elements of character than neither has alone. James does not teach works alone any more than he teaches faith alone.
 - Works justify, not in themselves alone, but they still justify. The works must complete and bring faith to its goal of justification. When James speaks of "faith alone," he is thinking of a faith which exists "in" or "by" itself and apart from any expression or work.

- Rahab is introduced undoubtedly to broaden the principle and to show that it operated outside the chosen Old Testament family. The principle includes every race, sex and condition of life. When Rahab did what she did, she walked in the steps of the faith which Abraham had (Romans 4:12).