

**BROOKLAND BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**Bible Study**  
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**Lecture XVI**

**Wednesday, May 17, 2023**

**James 2:2 (NIV) – “Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in.”**

James launches into a vivid hypothetical case study. Two men were entering a meeting. We can assume that these men were both visiting, since they are described only by appearance. The meeting was either a gathering of Jewish Christians or a meeting of the Jewish synagogue. The Greek Word *sunagoge* (*meeting or assembly*) generally refers to an assembly of people meeting for various purposes. In some instances, the meeting was for legal purposes — in most instances, for worship. One man was rich, as noted by his clothing and jewelry. A ring signified upper class and power. Rings were the same kind of visible status symbols that cars function as today. The rich man here is not a Christian (1:9–11) but is a non-Christian Jew (2:6–7).

This poor man, however, was dressed in filthy rags; he was most likely a beggar. James makes it very clear that the action about to be taken, if not guarded against, will be based entirely on the appearance of these two guests. The motive or attitude of the visitors does not come into question in this case study. Neither we nor the church members can know at first glance why these two people decided to come to the meeting.

Depending on the size of a church, the arrival of a visitor can have an electric effect. Sometimes panic sets in. The rush to welcome can be overwhelming to the newcomer. But whether the greeting is reserved or enthusiastic, what is most clearly communicated is its genuineness. Individual Christians can have a significant ministry in looking for newcomers of any kind in Church and making them feel welcome. The decision to follow Christ has often been made easier by a warm and honest welcome at the door of a church.

**James 2:3 (NIV) – “If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet, . . . .””**

The rich man was shown special attention — the Greek Word meaning *“to look with favor on”* a person. Indicated that the believers were impressed by him. He became the object of special service and deference. The rich man was singled out and escorted to a comfortable and favored seat. The poor man on the other hand gets standing room only, or a seat on the floor. It’s as if he is being told to stay apart from his *“betters”* by allowing them the seats, while he is given neither dignity nor comfort.

The Jews had a practice of seating the most important people nearest the sacred scrolls. Other people would be seated in the back. This unhealthy practice was still carried on by some Christians. Those with the most important jobs or roles would get preferred seating. James speaks out against this. It is our relationship with Christ that gives us dignity, not our profession or possessions. The Christian answer is not reverse discrimination — treating the poor like royalty and the rich like scum. Our goal is to treat people without consideration for their status. No one is unworthy to be seated.

Once, as Jesus observed the behavior of people arriving for an important social event, he commented on the tendency to jostle for the places of honor. ([Luke 14:7–11](#)) His instruction was, *“But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.”* ([Luke 14:10 NIV](#)) Jesus was warning against self-exaltation. Later, Jesus emphasized the danger of misreading outward evidence when he described how he appears to the world: *“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.”* ([Matthew 25:35 NIV](#)) The point is that favoritism is not just mistreating people or breaking a standard of conduct — it is, in fact, treating Jesus as though he had little value.

When we gather for worship, we ought to be conscious that even if we are familiar with everyone in the room, Christ is present. If there are two or three of us gathered in his name, He is there. ([Matthew 18:20](#)) When we neglect or ignore the poor or powerless, we also ignore Christ.

[James 2:4](#) (NIV) – *“Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”*

James expected his readers to answer “yes” to his question. He condemned their behavior because Christ had made them all one. Paul later wrote, *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”* ([Galatians 3:28 NRSV](#)) These believers were ignoring that fact. They were forced to admit that they were

discriminating against the poor person and becoming unjust judges with evil thoughts, making their judgments by worldly standards. As Christians they professed obedience to Christ, but their conduct defied him. **Leviticus 19:15** firmly states: “*Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.*” In addition, they broke the commandment of Jesus, who said, “*Judge not that you be not judged.*” (**Matthew 7:1**)

### **Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status?**

Wealth does not necessarily indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it can even be a sign of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness. When we honor someone just because he or she dresses well, we make appearance more important than character. Sometimes we do this because:

- **Poverty makes us uncomfortable**, and we don’t want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do.
- **We too want to be wealthy**, and we hope to use the rich person as a means to that end.
- **We want the rich person to join our Church** and help support it financially.
- **All these motives are selfish.** They may appear nothing more than practical considerations, but James calls them evil.

Another false assumption that sometimes influences our treatment of the rich is our misunderstanding of God’s relationship to wealth. It is deceptively easy to believe riches are a sign of God’s blessing and approval. But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Christ calls us to be ready to suffer for Him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life. (**Matthew 6:19–21**; **19:28–30**; **Luke 12:14–34**; **1 Timothy 6:17–19**) We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life. (**Luke 6:35**; **John 12:23–25**; **Galatians 6:7–10**; **Titus 3:4–8**)

**James 2:5** (NIV) – “*Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*”

Jesus’ first followers were common people. Christianity has a special message for the poor. Jesus often spoke of his mission to the poor: “*Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*” (**Luke 6:20 NKJV**; **Matthew 11:5**; **Luke 4:18–19**) In a social system that gave the poor very little, Jesus’ message to them was certainly good news.

Though most agree that James expected this rhetorical question to be answered “yes,” some would

argue that the biblical references to poor usually have to do with spiritual poverty. This is especially the case anytime the Bible seems to be saying that it might be an advantage to be poor. Their basis is the first Beatitude, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matthew 5:3 NKJV)

It is fundamentally important for us to acknowledge our spiritual poverty before God. But here James is simply making the observation, and expecting us to agree, that the poor in spirit are most often the poor in material wealth.

To continue to show favoritism to those who are only rich by the world’s standards is not only wrong, but shortsighted.

**James 2:6 (NIV) – “*But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?*”**

The Greek word for insulted is *etimasate*, which means “*dishonored*”. James’s readers had dishonored the poor because they did not treat them as God treats them. The vivid imagery of Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23–35) and his comment concerning the anointing given to him by the sinful woman (Luke 7:36–50) come to mind as the poor are being ignored or ushered to humble seats.

James showed how evil their actions were by asking three questions.

***First, is it not the rich who are exploiting you?***

In this society, the rich oppressed the poor. **To exploit means to use someone for profit** — to take advantage of someone and to use him or her selfishly for one’s own purposes. As we are reading these questions, we must remember James’s original case study (2:2–4). Both the rich person and the poor person in mind here are probably visitors to the church who are unbelievers. At best they are people whose faith is not yet known. The rich exploiting the poor was not a new development; there are references to this throughout the Old Testament. (Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Ezekiel 18:7; Amos 4:1; 8:4; Malachi 3:5)

If a poor person needed a loan, the rich person might offer it, but often at exorbitant interest (*pay day loans, title loans, finance companies*) (even though charging interest to a fellow Israelite was forbidden by God’s law — Exodus 22:25). In first-century Palestine, landowners and merchants often accumulated wealth and power, forcing the poor people from the land and causing them to

become even poorer. **Raising taxes, and foreclosures.**

***Second, is it not they who drag you into court?***

The rich typically showed no mercy or concern for the poor. **They would take the poor to court, most likely for not repaying a debt.** Wealthy moneylenders often took advantage of the poor. A creditor, if he met a debtor on the street, could literally grab him and drag him into court. James can ask this question because he takes it for granted that his readers would understand that believers are not to be taking legal action against each other. What an amazingly contemporary issue! What statement are we making to the world when it sees, within the church, believers habitually taking each other to court? The Bible does not deny that rightful grievances occur between people. But the options for settlement are broader and healthier. They include forgiveness, reconciliation, restitution — all handled among believers themselves. (*Matthew 5:23–26*; *1 Corinthians 6:1–8*).

But economic persecution was not the only oppression these believers faced from the wealthy; ***James’s third question focuses on religious persecution.***

***James 2:7* (NIV) – “Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?”**

These rich people were abusing the name of Christ either by speaking evil of him or by insulting Christians. It hadn’t taken long for the followers of Christ to be called Christians (***Christianous***) by those outside the church. (*Acts 11:26*) Being identified with the name of Christ helped indicate that they belonged to him. To be called a “Christian” was not an honor; it was a reproach heaped upon the believers by unbelievers. (*1 Peter 4:13–14*).

### **Origin and Meaning of the term Christian.**

Because the term “**Christian**” occurs so rarely in the NT, and because early followers of Jesus refer to themselves by other names, such as “**saints**” and “**brothers**,” we must look elsewhere than to the Christians themselves for the origin of the term. The word “**Christ**” (***Christos***) is the equivalent of the Hebrew word ***messiah***, meaning “***anointed one***,” and the Greek ending ***ianos*** means “***followers of***” or “***partisans of***.” Or ***hodos***, followers of the way.

It seems, then, that the term “**Christian**” did not originate among Jews or Christians but among pagans either in Rome or Antioch. If current in Rome in Nero’s time, it must have originated rather early. But if first applied to disciples of Jesus at Antioch, as Luke says, it may have been coined by Roman officials to distinguish the Christian group or new sect from Judaism, which was

an approved religion in the Roman Empire. Or perhaps, as some believe, the word “**Christian**” was used to designate the Christian movement as hostile toward Agrippa, to whom Rome gave a kingdom around the Sea of Galilee after c. 50 CE. At any rate, it was probably first used as a term of scorn, ridicule, or disdain, no matter when or where it originated.

**It often happens that those oppressed begin to act like their oppressors.**

This concept is explained by Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Where he explains that those who were once oppressed often themselves become the oppressors of others. (Senator Tim Scott, Clarence Thomas, Candace Owens - see also the Stockholm syndrome. We will discuss this in greater detail.)

The Stockholm syndrome describes the psychological condition of a victim who identifies with and empathizes with their captor or abuser and their goals. How wrong that this should happen among believers. James pointed out the irony that Christians would show favoritism to those who were known to slander Christ!

James asks his readers to listen carefully while he reminds them of the role the rich tended to play in their society. They were oppressors who exploited the poor. The rich oppressed others by:

- **Exploiting** them and their livelihood. (2:6)
  - *refusal to raise the minimum wage to \$25.00 an hour,*
  - *cutting federal monies to force them to go back to work for lower wages.*
- **Threatening** their security. (2:6)
  - Passing legislation
    - *to suppress voting rights*
    - *and police protection.*
- **Attacking** their identity. (2:7)

James’s answer does not give us the option of retaliation. There is no room to say, “*Get the rich before they get you.*” James’s answer is, “*Don’t show favoritism.*”

**James 2:8 (NIV)** - “*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well.*”

Love is the source from which our attitudes toward others should flow. This law is God’s will for his followers, for He said, “*Love each other as I have loved you.*” (**John 15:12**)

In the Old Testament, one's neighbor would be a fellow Israelite ([Leviticus 19:18](#); [Proverbs 14:21](#)); but Jesus' application included everyone with whom we might come into contact—even foreigners ([Luke 10:25–37](#)) and enemies ([Matthew 5:44](#)).

James was calling his readers to obey the royal law of love that would forbid them to discriminate against anyone who entered their fellowship.

We are to show favor to everyone, whether the person is rich or poor. We are to be kind, overlooking other superficial trappings. Our attitudes and actions toward others should be guided by love. When asked what was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, “***You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.***’ ... ***And ... ‘love your neighbor as yourself’***” ([Matthew 22:37–39](#) NRSV)

[James 2:9](#) (NIV) – “***But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.***”

### **James does not trivialize their actions.**

Showing favoritism is not a minor transgression or an unfortunate oversight; according to James it is sin, and those engaged in this action are lawbreakers. ***1 John 3:4*** says, “*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.*” (NIV)

Discrimination against anyone, whether on the basis of dress, race, social class, wealth, sex, etc., is a clear violation of the royal law of love. We must treat all people as we would want to be treated. We should not ignore the rich because then we would be withholding our love. But we must not favor them for what they can do for us, while ignoring the poor who can offer us little in return.

## **SHOWING FAVORITISM**

### **Why is it wrong to show favoritism to the wealthy?**

- It is inconsistent with Christ's teachings.
- **It results from** evil thoughts.
- **It insults people** made in God's image.
- **It is a by-product** of selfish motives.
- **It goes against** the biblical definition of love.
- **It shows a lack of** mercy to those less fortunate.
- **It is hypocritical.**



- **It is sin.**

**James 2:10 (NIV) – “For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”**

**Even our attitudes and motives come under the law’s jurisdiction.**

The attitude of favoritism was no different, so James points out to his readers that by their actions toward these wealthy visitors, they were actually breaking all of God’s law. The believers had not made the connection between God’s command to love their neighbor and their discrimination against the poor.

James’s point here is not that showing favoritism is as “*bad*” as murder, but that no matter what commandment someone breaks, that person is guilty of an offense against God. He or she has violated the Will of God. We cannot excuse the sin of favoritism by pointing to the rest of the good we do. Sin is not simply balanced against good — it must be confessed and forgiven.

**James 2:11 (NIV) – “For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”**

Here James illustrates his point that the law is a unit, and to break one law is to become guilty of the entire law. Jewish theologians of the day would have disagreed with James, saying some laws were “*light*” and some “*heavy*,” meaning that breaking some was not as serious as breaking others. It might seem that stumbling on the act of showing favoritism is breaking one of those “*least commandments*,” not nearly as bad as committing adultery or murdering. But God’s law was not written with “*heavy*” and “*light*” commands so that obedience to some outweighed obedience to others. Believers are called to consistent obedience.

**This reminds of Catholicism and its categories for types of sin.**

According to Catholicism Not all sins are of equal degree. The consequences of certain actions are greater than those of others. Catholics categorize sins based on their gravity. Original, mortal and venial are the three classes of sin.

- **Original Sin:** Original sin refers to the initial nature of people. Catholics believe all humans begin life in a state of sin. People are, at birth, separated from God because of the actions of the first humans, Adam and Eve, who disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden.



- **Mortal Sin:** Catholics believe that harming one's parents would be graver than doing the same to a stranger, for example.
- **Venial Sin:** Though of less severity than mortal sins, the venial variety can lead to serious repercussions if ignored. These are sins committed when disobeying moral law without full knowledge or complete consent. Venial sins are often committed through wicked thoughts rather than deliberate actions. Over time, venial sins weaken the ability of people to avoid committing mortal sins; in this regard, they are precursors to greater sins.

**From our perspective, there do seem to be degrees of sin.**

The immediate effects of some sins seem much more destructive and horrible than others. This is true. What we must remember, however, is God's perspective. He not only sees immediate effects, but he also sees hidden and long-term effects. And the long-term effect of all sin is rebellion against God. We make a serious error when we get caught up in discussing possible degrees of sin.

When we come Before God, self-justification is always a wasted effort. As lawbreakers we should come in confession and humility, placing ourselves under God's mercy and grace.

**James 2:12 (NIV) – “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.”**

There are two things that should stir us to love and care for all people, showing no favoritism whatsoever.

We shall face the judgment of God (**James** 2:12). Therefore, we should speak and act like people who will stand before God and give account for what we have done.

- We should speak love and kindness to all people.
- We should do or show love and kindness to all people.

Who a person is — their social standing and wealth, clothing and appearance — are to have no effect upon us whatsoever. We are to receive people, actually reach out to them through our speech and behavior, no matter who they are. God is going to judge us on the basis of how we have loved and reached out to people, regardless of who they are.

***"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye***

*forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).*

The fact is we shall receive a reciprocal reward for our behavior. God is going to treat us exactly as we have treated others. If we have shown mercy, then He will show mercy to us; if we have not shown mercy, then He will not show mercy to us. And note: there is only one thing that will rejoice victoriously over judgment and that is mercy. The judgment of God is going to swoop down and consume a person who has not shown mercy. Our only hope against the burning fire of God's judgment is mercy. Therefore, we must be merciful in order to escape the terrible judgment of God.

There was a mindset that there was no need for grace because God's standards had been translated into ***"things that determined people could accomplish with a great deal of effort."*** Divine purity and perfection had been redefined into human self-righteousness and superficial rule-keeping.

As Christians, we are saved by God's free gift (***grace***) through faith, not by keeping the law. But as Christians, we are also required to obey Christ. The apostle Paul taught, *"For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ"* to be judged for our conduct. (***2 Corinthians 5:10 NRSV***) God's grace does not cancel our duty to obey Him; it gives our obedience a new basis.

***James 2:13 (NIV) – "Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful."***

Mercy is precisely what the believers were *not* showing when they insulted poor people. If they continued to discriminate, they would be in danger of facing their own judgment without mercy. This is an excellent statement of New Testament ethics: What we do to others we actually do to God, and He returns it upon our heads.

The point of this is that God is going to treat us exactly as we have treated others. If we have shown mercy, then He will show mercy to us; if we have not shown mercy, then He will not show mercy to us. There is only one thing that will rejoice victoriously over

judgment and that is mercy.

***"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."***

The relationship between mercy and concern for the poor is made clear in **Zechariah 7:9–10**: *"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other' "* **Isaiah 58:7–9** - Also speaks to this concern.

**We must be merciful because God is merciful:**

- *"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6 NIV).*
- *"Because the Lord your God is a merciful God" (Deuteronomy 4:31 NRSV).*
- *"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.... As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him" (Psalms 103:8, 13 NIV).*

The world is looking for evidence that God is merciful. Being people who have experienced mercy and who express mercy will catch their attention.

*(the world)* attention.

**James 2:14 – *"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?"***

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:8–10 NIV)*

***We are not saved by works, but we are saved to do good works.***

The person who claims to have faith obviously thinks that his belief alone, without any good deeds (actions done in obedience to God), is satisfactory in God's sight. He need

not be concerned about anyone else.

**However, talk is cheap, and so unsubstantiated claims are worthless.**

Faith not accompanied by deeds has no saving value. Anyone can say they have faith, but if their life-style remains selfish and worldly, then what good is that faith? It is merely faith that believes *about* Jesus, not faith that believes *in* Him.

**Can faith save you? No, it cannot.** The structure of the Greek for this question expects a negative answer. The faith that saves is faith that proves itself in the actions it produces. There are two questions that every believer needs to ask themselves.

- **Can a person have faith and not do good works?**
- **Can faith without good works save anyone?**

Every thinking person who is honest knows that the answer to these two questions is an emphatic, "No!" A person who really believes something does something; they act. Yet this is the curse of Christianity and of the church. Millions profess faith in Christ and belong to the church, yet they do not live for Christ. They live for the world and self. They have been baptized and confirmed, joined the church and attend worship services, but they do what they want when they want. They just go on and live like everyone else in the world. The only difference between their lives and unbelievers is that they sometimes get up on Sunday mornings and attend church. There is little if any difference between their behavior and speech during the week.

James asks a piercing question: "What profit is it if a man says he has faith, and he does not do good works? Can his faith save him?" Note two significant facts.

- 1.) The person who says they have faith. But it is only what they say; they do nothing to show that they really believe in Christ. They do not live for Christ; they do not live righteously and godly in this present world, looking for the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Their faith is only a faith of speech, not of behavior and life. Their faith is only a faith of

profession, not of possession. Their faith is only a false profession.

- 2.) It is just a *vain, empty faith, an unprofitable faith*—a faith that profits absolutely nothing. It is not enough to claim that we have faith and not live for Christ. We must believe Christ—really believe—that He is the Savior and Lord of life. If we really believe, we will do what Christ says. We will live for Christ and do the works that please Christ. We will live a *Christ-centered life, not a Christless life*.

James helps us see that genuine faith will always combine deep trust in God and consistent action in the world. It is not the one who claims to have faith, but the one who actually has faith who is saved.

### **James 2:15 – “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.”**

This hypothetical person may have been someone in the church fellowship a brother or sister who was in real need. To be without clothing and food is to be in a desperate yet all-too-common situation. James’s second case study also rings true in contemporary life. There is hardly a church today within whose walls there are not persons who live without adequate food and shelter.

This example used by James really rebukes us, rebukes most believers and most churches throughout the world.

A brother or sister faces some need or problem that makes him or her destitute. They are unable to properly dress themselves, to stay warm, and to secure enough daily food. We see them and share words of comfort with them. We speak peace and sometimes give a few items to help them in their need as they seek to solve their problem for warmth and food.

Most believers and churches go this far. When a brother or sister has need, we visit, comfort, and wish them well. But this is not enough. What good is it if we do not give them the things they need?

The point is this: faith, if it does not do good works, is dead. True faith loves and cares and is compassionate and reaches out to help the needy. A person can talk about believing in Jesus Christ until he is blue in the face, but if he is not reaching out and helping the destitute of the world just like Jesus did, his faith is dead utterly meaningless. True faith is an operative faith, a faith that really works. Therefore, if we really believe in Christ, we will follow Christ: we will take all that we are and have beyond our own needs and give it to meet the needs of destitute brothers and sisters throughout the world.

**James 2:16** – *“If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”*

James leaves no doubt that the person in need is a brother or sister in Christ. The argument is strikingly similar to John’s words: *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:17–18 NIV)*

**“Go, I wish you well.” (NIV)**

This reflects a standard farewell blessing in Hebrew. The emphasis is on *Go!* It implied that the departing friend’s present needs were met and that one was hoping for the same in the future.

**“Keep warm and well fed.” (NIV)**

The idea here is that the well-wisher is saying, *“Please go, and may God take care of you because I don’t have the time.”* This brings out the hypocrisy of those who, in a sense, are asking God to do what God wants *them* to do. Also, one of the key elements of prayer, as in **Matthew 9:35–38**, followed by the mission in **Matthew 10**, is that when we pray for God to do something there is a very real chance that we may be the ones to fulfill our own prayer request, and God demands that we consider that possibility.

***“But does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” (NIV)***

Something could be done for this person. There would be plenty of clothes and food in the fellowship to care for this person, but the person was sent away empty-handed, with a prayer over his/her head, but no clothing on his/her back or food in his/her stomach.

Too often, we in the church offer mere words, prayers, advice, and encouragement—when we are being called upon to act. The need is obvious, and the resources are not lacking, yet the help is not given. Faith that does not result in actions is no more effective than a pious wish for the poor person to be warmed and fed — the wish accomplishes nothing.

This is tantamount to our greetings “You are in our thoughts and prayers” We must have compassion with action.

Among Paul’s final words to the Galatians were, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (Galatians 6:10 NIV)* James is describing Christians who miss the opportunities to help.

## **WHAT ABOUT PHYSICAL NEEDS?**

Have we received God’s gracious gifts and yet withheld them from others? Here are some ways we can give:

- Look for a single parent in need of help—car repairs, child care, help with financial or legal concerns.
- Provide meals for a sick or grieving family.
- Help a student whose college finances are a burden.
- Assist a young family with food, clothes, school supplies and toys for the children.

**James 2:17 – *“In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”***



A conviction or intellectual belief that refuses to obey the commands of Christ is unprofitable—it is dead. **Action** is the fruit of living faith. If there are no positive actions, then the professed faith is dead. The right actions prove our faith to be real faith.

We might call this approach by James an argument from compassion. He is taking for granted the truth that spoken help is not adequate when material help is required. Real compassion doesn't just talk; it does. In the same way, writes James, faith is not just a matter of saying the right words—it must also be accompanied by action. Believing involves faith keeping company with action. If those around us note our actions, they should be led to know the faith that motivates them. If others hear us speak of faith, they must also see us act out that faith. The emphasis is on both: our life representing a genuine fellowship of faith and action. The balance can be kept by asking ourselves two questions regularly: (1) to whom should I explain why I live the way I do? And (2) who needs to see more clearly that I back up my words of faith with action?

**James 2:18 - NRSV – “But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.”**

This *someone* may have been someone James personally knew, but it seems more likely that this was a hypothetical person who poses an argument to James. This someone considers faith and works to be separate and alternate expressions of Christianity. “*You do your deeds, I’ll have my faith, and we’ll be religious in our own ways.*” But the two cannot be separated without ceasing to be alive. Faith lives in the action it generates; actions require faith to gain a particular meaning.

**James 2:18 – (NIV) – “But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.”**

. “

James responded with a challenge: Show me your faith without deeds. It cannot be done! Faith cannot be demonstrated apart from action. Faith is within us; it can only be seen by the actions it produces through us. Anyone can profess faith, but only action

shows its genuineness.

The “*self-styled religion*” mentality that is such a part of today’s world needs to be challenged with as much vigor as James challenged the mistake in his own time. Any faith that does not move its believers to action is a faith not worth holding. Any believer who is not moved by his faith has a weak hold on what he claims to believe. And actions that are not expressions of faith rooted in the grace of Jesus Christ are pointless efforts.

***James 2:19 (NIV) – “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.”***

James now gives an example of the orthodox religionists. A true man of religion believes in one God: he is not an atheist nor an agnostic. He is a believer, and note: his belief in God is said to be a good thing. The man does well to believe in God. But believing in God is not enough. There is a dead belief and a living belief, a belief that does not lead to salvation and a belief that does lead to salvation.

Consider the demons or evil spirits. They believe in God; they even know that God exists. They even believe in the deity of Christ. On one occasion they cried out to Jesus, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God?" (Matthew 8:29). But the demons are not saved. Their belief has not affected their lives and behavior at all.

***James 2:20 (NIV) – “You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?”***

Therefore, know this, know exactly what James 2:20 says: "Know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead." Do not be vain [empty, useless, foolish], true faith is a living faith, a faith that works, a faith that stirs a person to live for Christ—to live a righteous and pure life and to give all he is and has to reach a lost and desperate world for Christ.

The foolish person is literally a “*hollow man*” (*anthrope kene*). If the faith around

which we build our lives turns out to be empty, we are truly hollow people.

**Do you want to be shown ... that faith apart from works is barren?**

James prepares to show from the Scriptures that real faith always has works. The phrase here is literally, *“But are you willing to know?”* — indicating that he realizes the problem may reside in his readers’ will rather than in their having good reasons to act upon their faith. There are times when we need more teaching or understanding in order to respond to God’s direction. But most often we know what needs to be done, yet are unwilling to act. When it comes to putting into practice what we know, is it our habit to obey God?

From his own case studies, James now turns to historical figures from the Old Testament that he expects will confirm what he has been teaching about the importance of active faith.

***James 2:21 (NIV) - “Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?”***

Abraham was one of the Old Testament figures most revered by the Jews. Abraham’s remarkable obedience in being willing to sacrifice his son at God’s command was evidence of the works for which Abraham was called righteous.

What *was* Abraham doing when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? He was trusting God. The lesson we can draw from Abraham’s life is not a comparison between his sacrifices and ours. We can expect that in one way or another, our faith will have to grow from internal trust to external action. Eventually, like Abraham, we too will have to answer the question, ***“Do I really trust God?”***

**James 2:22 (NIV) – “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.”**

**Faith was active along with works.**

Abraham had great faith in God (Genesis 15:6), but James points out that Abraham’s

faith was much more than just belief in the one God the fruit of Abraham's great faith was in his deeds.

### **Faith was brought to completion by the works.**

The Greek here has a play on words: Abraham's faith was working (*sunergei*) with his works (*ergois*). His faith produced his works, and his works completed his faith, meaning they "*perfected*" or "*matured*" it. Mature and complete believers are produced through perseverance in trials; mature and complete faith is produced through works of obedience to God. Faith and works should not be confused with each other, but neither can they be separated from each other.

**James 2:23 (NIV) - "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend."**

Abraham believed God, so God gave Abraham the status of a right relationship with him and this happened *before* Abraham's noted works; such as his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, and even before Abraham was circumcised.

But Abraham's faith and God's response *fulfilled* Scripture (meaning "*filled*" or "*filled up*" — gave their complete significance) when Abraham "*completed*" his faith by what he did. The Scripture to which James is referring is **Genesis 15:6**. Paul emphasized the chronology of Abraham's life, pointing out that he was called righteous before his noted works. James showed that Abraham's righteousness was the basis and reason for all those works.

### **He was called the friend of God.**

Because of Abraham's great faith and obedience, he held the privileged status of God's friend. (**2 Chronicles 20:7**; **Isaiah 41:8**)

The word *friend* (*philos*) is the same one Jesus used in **John 15:14**. There Jesus stated that an ingredient of friendship is obedience: "*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*" (**John 15:14 NRSV**) Among Jesus' commands earlier during that

occasion was this: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”* (**John 14:1** NIV) Acting out our trust in God will lead to friendship with him, as it did in Abraham’s case. This says that Abraham had an intimate relationship with God; he believed God and walked in communion and fellowship with God, following and living for God.

**James 2:24** (NRSV) – *“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*

Many have said that this statement contradicts Paul’s position, who wrote: *“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”* (**Romans 3:28** NIV) Indeed, if both James and Paul used the word *justified* in the same way, this verse would contradict Paul’s teaching about justification by faith alone. But for James, *justified* refers to God’s final verdict over our entire Christian life, whereby we are declared righteous for having lived a life that was faithful to the end. For Paul, justified is the initial granting of righteousness upon a person’s acceptance of Christ. For James, **“works”** (*what he does*) are the natural products of true faith; for Paul, **“works”** (*observing the law*) are what people were trying to **do** in order to be saved. For James, faith alone is the shallow belief in an idea; no commitment or life change is involved. For Paul, faith is saving faith — the belief that brings about an intimate union with Christ and results in salvation **and** obedience.

Paul made clear that a person enters into God’s kingdom only by faith; James made clear that God requires good deeds from those who *are* **“in”** the kingdom. In other words we don’t do good works to be saved we do good works because we are saved.

A person receives salvation by faith alone, not by doing works of obedience; but a saved person does works of obedience because of that faith. For people who rely on their religious **“busyness”** for their salvation or merit before God, Paul’s words are critical—those works alone can do nothing to save them. For people who rely on their intellectual assent of a belief, with only a verbal commitment, James’s words are critical — their belief alone can do nothing to save them.

**James 2:25 (NIV) – “In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?”**

James offers two illustrations of the point of view on which he is insisting. Abraham is the great example of faith; but Abraham's faith was proved by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac at the apparent demand of God. Rahab was a famous figure in Jewish legend. She had sheltered the spies sent to spy out the Promised Land. (**Josh 2:1-21**)

Later legend said that she became a proselyte to the Jewish faith, that she married Joshua and that she was a direct ancestress of many priests and prophets, including Ezekiel and Jeremiah. It was her treatment of the spies which proved that she had faith. Paul and James are both right here. Unless Abraham had had faith he would never have answered the summons of God. Unless Rahab had had faith, she would never have taken the risk of identifying her future with the fortunes of Israel. And yet, unless Abraham had been prepared to obey God to the uttermost, his faith would have been unreal; and unless Rahab had been prepared to risk all to help the spies, her faith would have been useless.

These two examples show that faith and deeds are not opposites; they are, in fact, inseparables. No man will ever be moved to action without faith; and no man's faith is genuine unless it moves him to action. Faith and deeds are opposite sides of a man's experience of God.

Both these heroes demonstrate the fact that real faith can survive in people with “*feet of clay*.” The Bible describes neither Abraham nor Rahab as perfect. In fact, the spotlight shines on their sins as much as on their trust. Both demonstrated in their own way a tendency to lie. (**Genesis 20:1-2**; **Joshua 2:3-7**)

Neither could have pointed to a life of perfect obedience as the reason for God's acceptance. Rather, each pointed to a life that illustrated their need for God and their

trust in God.

## TWELVE TESTS OF ABRAHAM

Abraham's faith was tested at least twelve specific times. Some of them were not what we might call big tests, but together they establish a picture of Abraham as a person whose faith was genuine. After the last of these, God said, "*Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.*" (**Genesis 22:12**)

**Each of Abraham's tests can have applications for us:**

<i>Reference</i>	<i>Test</i>	<i>Application</i>
1.) <b>Genesis 12:1–7</b>	<b>Abraham left Ur and Haran</b> for an unknown destination at God's direction.	Do I trust God with my future? Is his will part of my decision making?
2.) <b>Genesis 13:8–13</b>	<b>Abraham directed a peaceful separation</b> from Lot and settled at the oaks of Mamre.	Do I trust God with my interests even when I seem to be receiving an unfair settlement?
3.) <b>Genesis 14:13–16</b>	<b>Abraham rescued Lot</b> from the five kings.	Does my faithfulness to others bear witness to my trust in God's faithfulness?
4.) <b>Genesis 14:17–24</b>	<b>Abraham gave a tithe of loot</b> to the godly king of Salem, Melchizedek, and refused the gift of the king of Sodom.	Am I watchful in my dealings with people that I give proper honor to God and refuse to receive honor that belongs to him?
5.) <b>Genesis 15:1–6</b>	<b>Abraham trusted God's promise</b> that he would have a son.	How often do I consciously reaffirm my trust in God's promises?
6.) <b>Genesis 15:7–11</b>	<b>Abraham received the promised land by faith,</b>	How have I demonstrated my continued trust in God



	though the fulfillment would not come for many generations.	during those times when I have been required to wait?
7.) <b>Genesis 17:9–27</b>	At God’s command, Abraham circumcised every male in his family.	In what occasions in my life have I acted simply in obedience to God, and not because I understood the significance of what I was doing?
8.) <b>Genesis 18:1–8</b>	Abraham welcomed strangers, who turned out to be angels.	When was the last time I practiced hospitality?
9.) <b>Genesis 18:22–33</b>	<b>Abraham prayed for Sodom.</b>	Am I eager to see people punished, or do I care for people in spite of their sinfulness?
10.) <b>Genesis 20:1–17</b>	<b>Abraham admitted to wrongdoing</b> and took the actions needed to set things right.	When I sin, is my tendency to cover up, or confess? Do I practice the truth that an apology must sometimes be accompanied by restitution?
11.) <b>Genesis 21:22–34</b>	<b>Abraham negotiated a treaty</b> with Abimelech concerning a well.	Can people depend on my words and promises?
12.) <b>Genesis 22:1–12</b>	<b>Abraham prepared to sacrifice</b> his son Isaac.	In what ways has my life demonstrated that I will not allow anything to come before God?

**James 2:26 (NIV) – “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is**

*dead.”*

A body without the spirit or breath is dead. It does not move, act, live, or work. It is empty, totally useless and worthless. It is a dead body. So it is with faith: faith without works is dead. It does not move, act, live, or work. Faith without works is empty, totally useless and worthless.

This draws us back to James’s words in the first part of this chapter concerning care for others. The believer must do what God called them to do serve their brothers and sisters in Christ, refuse to discriminate against them, and reaching people and meeting the needs of a destitute world.