



**JAMES: Week 2**

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## **JAMES**

### **WEEK 2: Faith and Love in Action**

**Bottom Line:** Faith and works, works and faith, fit together.

### **WEEK 1 REVIEW**

Last week, we began our journey through the Book of James.

As we discussed last week, James addresses some of the most common obstacles in the life of the believer and provides practical wisdom to approach them.

In James 1, we learn that trials and temptations don't go away when we choose to follow Jesus.

We should expect them and—this is the hard part—understand that God can use them to transform us into the person He intends us to be.

After all, without trials, there is no growth.

It's like the adage, "No pain, no gain."

James 1 also addresses typical hypocrisy evident in the lives of believers, hearing—but not doing.

James says that we are "deceived" if we only listen to God's Word, but don't follow His commands.

We become hypocrites, and that's the last thing we want to be, especially when others are watching.

### **Discussion questions:**

1. What lesson or truth from last week's lesson stands out most to you?

Why?

2. Explain how your response to a trial or temptation can lead others to Christ (or away from him).
3. Why is "doing" harder than "listening"?

What could you lose by becoming a "doer of the Word"?

## **LESSON**

**Read James 2:1-13.**

**1** *My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others?*

**2** *For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. **3** If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, “You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor”—well, **4** doesn’t this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?*

**5** *Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn’t God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren’t they the ones who will inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love him? **6** But you dishonor the poor! Isn’t it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? **7** Aren’t they the ones who slander Jesus Christ, whose noble name you bear?*

**8** *Yes indeed, it is good when you obey the royal law as found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” **9** But if you favor some people over others, you are committing a sin. You are guilty of breaking the law.*

**10** *For the person who keeps all the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws. **11** For the same God who said, “You must not commit adultery,” also said, “You must not murder.” So, if you murder someone but do not commit adultery, you have still broken the law.*

**12** *So whatever you say or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law that sets you free. **13** There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you.*

Here, again, James addresses the issue of knowing what is right but not doing it.

In this case, it has to do with showing favoritism.

Sadly, most, if not all of us, are guilty of this sin.

We make assumptions about people based on their appearance and treat them differently because of it.

Have you ever judged someone by the clothes they wear, by the color of their skin, by their nationality, or by their ethnicity?

In Chapter 2, James was writing to a group of people who were used to division.

This lesson was one of many that didn't seem to align with the culture where the believers lived.

In other words, the culture taught that division was normal.

How were believers supposed to buck that system and condemn prejudice?

Let's talk a little bit about the church that James was speaking to.  
The early church was a beacon of light to the ancient world.

And part of the reason that people were so drawn to it was that the teachings they followed were so counterculture.

The idea of forgiving enemies, blessing those who curse you, taking care of the poor, giving up all your possessions, and linking arms with former murderers, tax collectors; I

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-these ideas were CRAZY.

But when the church followed these commands, what a statement it made to those on the fringes of society!

The early church was bold, unique, and inspiring.

But that doesn't mean it was perfect.

Sin still crept into the early church just like it does in our churches today.

Today, we know—without a doubt—that God doesn't like partiality.

And yet, we still struggle to obey.

The sin of prejudice is still alive and well in our churches.

So, what do we do with it?

We repent.

We choose to DO the Word, not just listen to it.

We're still called today to shock the world with our love.

And when we welcome those that the world criticizes and neglects, we show the world that we're different.

We set ourselves apart from our culture.

We show the world what the Gospel looks like.

### **Discussion questions:**

1. When you meet new people, what is your first response?

Do you judge them, welcome them, ignore them?

2. Why is it so hard to recognize our own prejudice?
3. In today's culture, what types of beliefs or ideas divide us?

Can you see the effects of that division in your own life?

**Read James 2:14-26.**

**14** *What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? 15* Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, **16** and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?

**17** So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

**18** Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." But I say, "How can you show me your faith if you don't have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds."

**19** You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. **20** How foolish! Can't you see that faith without good deeds is useless?

**21** Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. **23** And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. **24** So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

**25** Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road. **26** Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

Over the years, there have been many disagreements about this excerpt of scripture.

Some have claimed that, when James says in verse 17 that "faith isn't enough," he is saying that faith with good works will save us.

However, James was talking to a group of people (Jews who had converted to Christianity) who used to live by the law.

This meant that they were used to the heavy burden of works.

When they learned of the freedom that comes with saving grace through faith, they become lax in their outward behavior.

In other words, they made the incorrect assumption that works didn't matter at all.

James was addressing this misconception.

In these verses, he explains that true faith should be accompanied by works of righteousness.

He's NOT saying that works save us, as this would contradict the Gospel message.

However, he IS saying that, when we are saved by grace, we are compelled, urged, inspired to do good works to glorify God.

After all, if God truly lives within us, wouldn't he urge us toward works that glorify His Name?

James' words, therefore, don't contradict Paul's teachings about being saved through faith.

We are *saved* simply by believing that Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection to life offers us eternal life if we choose to follow him.

Our works are *evidence* that our hearts belong to Jesus.

**Discussion questions:**

1. Is it possible to show your faith without deeds/good works?
2. Why do you think James included Abraham and Rahab when demonstrating what faith and good works should look like?
3. Where does the motivation to do good works come from?