

JAMES

Chapter 2

The Sin of Partiality

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? 8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

2:1 *my brothers show no partiality.* God does not show favoritism—nor should believers. (CSB)

Unfair act of judgment based on worldly criteria (cf 1:27). God never shows partiality (Rm 2:9–11), and His people are commanded to act similarly. (TLSB)

The Greek word for favoritism (*prosōpolēmskia*, v 1, and the verb in v 9) comes from the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew idiom *nasa panim* “to lift up [someone’s] face,” “to receive favorably or show favor to.” God does not show favoritism (Rom 2:11), but treats all the same. Consequently, those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ—who have been reborn with his new life (1:18)—are to live as he does. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

prosōpolēmpsiai, literally “receiving faces,” that is, showing partiality based on outward appearances. This is called sin in v 9. *echete tēn pistin tou kyriou.* James is addressing specifically those in the faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

Lord of glory. Glory is a result of Christ’s victorious resurrection and exaltation (cf Lk 24:26). (TLSB)

Jesus is described as the Christ of glory. Because of the Semitic character of James’ letter, “glory” may refer to God’s visible presence, as in Rom 9:4 (see Exod 16:7, 10—God’s glory in the cloud—and the post-Biblical Jewish concept of the Shekinah). Jesus is the “radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Heb 1:3). Paradoxically, the glory of God was concealed in the Man who suffered and died on the cross. He was despised by the world but exalted by the Father. Similarly, Christians must not judge by external appearances or by the standards of the world which failed to discern Christ’s glory and rejected him. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

It is a peculiar fact that history repeats itself, that the same conditions seem to be found in the Christian congregations after just about so long a time of Gospel preaching. The apostle does not hesitate to attack the evil with all the power at his command: My brethren, not in respect of persons hold the faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord of Glory. The Christian faith must not be abused, nor dare shame and disgrace be brought upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and the King of Glory. The reference is probably to the fact that the second person of the Godhead was present in the cloud of glory which accompanied the children of Israel on their journey through the wilderness and afterward appeared at the dedication of the Temple of Solomon. Such a condition of affairs, however, such servile regard of people, altogether out of agreement with the spirit shown by Jesus Christ in His treatment of men, had crept into the churches. Men were not regarded on the basis of their Christianity, their moral excellence, their personal piety, their usefulness to the congregation, but on the basis of the wealth which they had accumulated. (Kretzmann)

2:2-4 Who is the rich man who comes into the assembly? Reicke (*The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, The Anchor Bible) sees the man with “splendid garments” and the gold ring as a non-Christian Roman politician who, by his presence, seems beneficial to the church. Lange’s Commentary (p. 74) sees him as a symbol of Jewish Christians who wear their “covenant right” pretentiously. The desire for the important seats in the synagogue, so typical of the Pharisees, was condemned by Jesus (Matt 23:6). More important than whom exactly James was speaking of is the question, “Who is our rich man who causes division in the church today?” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Jesus warned that a “kingdom divided against itself will be ruined and a house divided against itself will fall” (Luke 11:17). Discrimination, and the resulting divisions, common among unbelievers (Rom 1:21), are denounced. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Example of partiality. Such distinctions are evil because they do not reflect the way God views people. James frequently singles out the rich for condemnation and describes the humble and poor as exalted by the Lord (cf 1:9–10; 4:6, 10; 5:1–6). Partiality either to the poor or the wealthy is condemned in Lv 19:15. (TLSB)

2:2 assembly. The Greek for this term is the origin of the English word “synagogue.” (CSB)

A person’s appearance communicates his status. (TLSB)

2:3 at my feet. Lowest position. (TLSB)

The text pictures a meeting, an assembly of worship, as it was held in those days. In steps a man whose wealth and influence is apparent at first glance. He is bedecked with gold rings, he wears the fine white garment which was assumed by rich Jews. Hardly has he entered the door, when the members crowd forward to meet him. With obsequious deference they place the best seat in the room at his disposal, their faces, at the same time, displaying the admiration for wealth and power which fills their hearts. But immediately after there steps in a poor man, clad in a simple garment, perhaps even soiled with the labor of his hands. There is no deferential ushering as he apologetically tries to find a place where he may stay. Instead, he is curtly told that he may stand in the room reserved in the rear; or, if that does not suit him, he may sit down on the floor. Note: History repeats itself also in this, that these very conditions obtain in many so-called Christian houses of worship to this day. (Kretzmann)

2:4 judges with evil thoughts? Wealth-based distinctions between people do not reflect God’s vision and are therefore evil. (TLSB)

But the apostle gives his opinion of such behavior in sharp words, telling his readers that they are thereby making a false distinction, a wrong and foolish discrimination, that they are dividing the congregation of the Lord into parties without the consent of the Lord, in a manner which in no way accords with His own acceptance of publicans and sinners. Incidentally, men calling themselves Christians and yet acting in such a manner become judges according to evil surmisings, according to false considerations. To judge a man by his outward appearance only and to condemn him on account of his poverty is to defame him both in thought and deed, an act very decidedly at variance with the Eighth Commandment. (Kretzmann)

They are making “distinctions” among themselves, differentiating according to appearances, and therefore judging wrongly. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

2:5–13 James gives three arguments against showing favoritism to the rich: 1. The rich persecute the poor—the believers (vv. 5–7). 2. Favoritism violates the royal law of love and thus is sin (vv. 8–11). 3. Favoritism will be judged (vv. 12–13).

2:5 *Has not God chosen those who are poor ... ?* See Lk 6:20; 1Co 1:26–31. (CSB)

A person’s worth comes not from possessions but from his relationship to God. (TLSB)

There is a higher standard for judging people. What counts before God is being rich in faith. This wealth has been given to those poor in the world’s eyes—the “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3). They have been chosen by God so as to shame the wise and strong, that no one may boast before God (1 Cor 1:26–31). James’ purpose is not to condemn all who are wealthy, but to rebuke and correct the attitude of favoring those who have money and power, since this attitude creates division in the church and prevents love for one’s neighbors (i.e., those in need, Luke 10:36–37). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

In solemn warning the apostle calls out: Listen, my beloved brethren: Did not God choose the poor according to this world, rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him? This fact the readers should consider, of that they should never lose sight. It is the poor people in this world’s goods, the weak, the foolish, that God has chosen, 1 Cor. 1, 27. 28. The wise and mighty of this world are inclined to sneer at the Gospel of the poor Galilean fishermen and of the Nazarene that died on the cross. Therefore the Lord has chosen the poor, not because their hearts by nature are any better than those of the wealthy and mighty, but because they at least have not the handicap which riches are apt to prove to contend with. And it is the Lord’s choosing which has made the poor rich in faith, which has assured them of the inheritance of the saints in light, the glorious reward of mercy in heaven above, which God has promised to those that love Him. (Kretzmann)

the kingdom. The kingdom that is entered by the new birth (Jn 3:3, 5) and that will be consummated in the future (Mt 25:34, 46). (CSB)

As the Father’s adopted children, we will inherit His kingdom (Gal 4:1–7), where we will live with Him and receive the crown of life (Jas 1:12). (TLSB)

2:6 *dishonored the poor* – Reproachfully the apostle therefore writes: You, however, insult the poor, both dishonoring and despising them. (Kretzmann)

Exalting the lofty person dishonors the humble, whom God has exalted (1:9; 4:10). (TLSB)

rich the ones who oppress – In this connection the apostle reminds the Jewish Christians of another fact: Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before their tribunals? Do they not blaspheme

the excellent name which was laid upon you by your call? He speaks of the rich people as a class, characterizing them by the behavior which is commonly found where they have the power. They make use of violence, they oppress those that are not in their own class, they try to lord it over them at all times; they foster lawsuits, believing that their money will buy them the decision which justice would never render. (Kretzmann)

This is not persecution for being a Christian, but lawsuits for economic reasons as in Acts 16:19-24; cf. 1 Cor. 6:1-8. (TLSB)

2:7 *blaspheme the honorable name.* Christ's name (v 1). Rejecting the poor man, who was chosen by Christ, is rejecting Christ Himself. (TLSB)

by which you were called? Or, "invoked over you," referring to Baptism (1:18). (TLSB)

And altogether too many of them will not believe that they are in need of the Savior and His redemption, they blaspheme the name of Him that called the Christians by faith, and added them to the communion of saints. The conduct of the believers, therefore, in acting with a false deference to all the wealthy people, is all the more reprehensible. (Kretzmann)

to kalon onoma to epiklēthen eph' umas, literally "the good name having been called on you." Those in the faith have been called children of God and have been called to do good works. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 4)

2:8 *royal law.* The law of love (Lev 19:18) is called "royal" because it is the supreme law that is the source of all other laws governing human relationships. It is the summation of all such laws (Mt 22:36-40; Ro 13:8-10). (CSB)

"Royal" is the same Gk word as "kingdom" (v 5), indicating this is the "Law of the Kingdom"; that same Law is interpreted and fulfilled in Christ. Jesus quotes and applies Lv 19:18 frequently; cf Lk 10:25-37. (TLSB)

James affirms the high teaching of Lev 19:18. Love is the fundamental attitude required toward all, according to the "royal" law—the Old Testament as well as the New. This is the law of the one true king, Jesus Christ. Doctrinally, it really is Gospel, not Law (see on 1:25 in the previous article; the "Introduction to James"; and Matt 22:34-40; John 13:34). Love, of course, cannot be coerced by the threats of the Law; it can only be elicited by God's love in the Gospel. One needs to distinguish Law and Gospel carefully when preaching on the terms *law, commandment*, etc., since these can be Gospel terms in Scripture. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The apostle, then, offers this conclusion: If, indeed, you fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, you do well; but if you have respect of persons, you commit a sin, and are convicted by the Law as transgressors. There is a royal law, a rule of the Kingdom, which should be heeded also by Christians as expressing the will of God, namely, the precept that they should love their neighbors as themselves, making no distinction between rich and poor, between fashionable and unimportant. Such conduct is well-pleasing to God. (Kretzmann)

2:9 *convicted by the law.* Since partiality breaks the specific command of Lv 19:15, the general law to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lv 19:18) is also broken. (TLSB)

But if the Christians make such false distinctions as outlined by the apostle above, preferring the rich and influential merely on account of their money and not on account of their Christian life and moral worth, then they are transgressing the will of God and stand convicted by Him and by His Law, which will then apply once more. It is a willful, conscious sin of which they will be guilty, and there will be no excuse for them. It is a warning which will bear repetition in our days. (Kretzmann)

Once again, James affirms Old Testament ethics as appropriate for guiding Christian living. The prohibition of favoritism occurs also in Lev 19:15, where the NIV translates “do not show . . . favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” Those who sin in this way are called “lawbreakers,” people who have crossed over the line, transgressors. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

2:10-12 To keep the whole Law is to “guard” it against violation. Yet, if a person stumbles over one aspect of the Law, he or she is outside the Law and thus guilty of breaking it all (cf. Matt 5:19). You cannot claim a place in the kingdom because you kept most of the Law. As often, James echoes Jesus’ teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:22): that failing to love all your neighbors on an equal basis demonstrates lovelessness and invites judgment by the law (Gospel!) that provides mercy for all. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

2:10 *guilty of all.* The law is the expression of the character and will of God; therefore to violate one part of the law is to violate God’s will and thus his whole law (cf. Mt 5:18–19; 23:23). (CSB)

Because all Commandments come from God, all must be obeyed perfectly. This was made clear in the giving of the covenant to Israel (Dt 27:26; 28:15), as well as by Jesus. Even one violation falls short of the righteousness God requires (Jas 1:20). When we break God’s Law, we disrespect Him, for He established that Law. (TLSB)

The solidarity, the unity of the will of God is here brought out. For in connection with the fact that a carnal preference of persons is a transgression of the holy will of God, the apostle argues: For whoever keeps the whole Law, offends, however, in a single thing, has become guilty of all. A person might argue that an offense of the kind as explained by the apostle really did not amount to much, that the fault, if it might be designated so, would surely be overlooked by God. But as a matter of fact, he that transgresses, stumbles, becomes guilty in any single point pertaining to the Law of God, no matter how insignificant it might seem by comparison, is considered a transgressor of all. To profane one commandment means to have broken all. (Kretzmann)

2:11 These specific commandments illustrate the principle of v 10—breaking one law makes a person completely guilty before God. (TLSB)

2:12 James exhorts his readers to remember that they were counted righteous for Christ’s sake. How can they then judge others by a different standard? God’s grace is available to all. (TLSB)

judged. This judgment is not for determining eternal destiny, for James is speaking to believers (v. 1), whose destiny is already determined (Jn 5:24). Rather, it is for giving rewards to believers (1Co 3:12–15; 2Co 5:10; Rev 22:12). (CSB)

2:13 *Mercy triumphs over judgment!* If man is merciful, God will be merciful on the Day of Judgment (see Pr 21:13; Mt 5:7; 6:14–15; 18:21–35). (CSB)

judgment. God's judgment on the sinner, here the "one who has shown no mercy." *Mercy triumphs over judgment.* Summarizes the first part of ch 2: God's people are to show mercy, not judgment or partiality. God has shown this same mercy to us. (TLSB)

2:1–13 James rebukes an act that is inconsistent with the righteous life: judging others based on their appearance, wealth, or status. The desire for wealth leads us to lift up the wealthy and look down on the poor. This is not God's way. He shows no partiality but calls all people to faith in Christ and grants the same gift of salvation to all in the waters of Baptism. James calls us to look at one another as those for whom Christ died because the name of Christ has been given to us in Baptism (v 7). He gives all His people a new identity that the world cannot give. We live together in Him, serving and building up one another until His return. • Forgive me, Lord, for looking at the face and not the heart. May Your name, spoken over me in my Baptism, be glorified in my life as I serve Your people. Amen. (TLSB)

Faith Without Works Is Dead

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! 20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God. 24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

2:14–26 In vv. 14–20, 24, 26 "faith" is not used in the sense of genuine, saving faith. Rather, it is demonic (v. 19), useless (v. 20) and dead (v. 26). It is a mere intellectual acceptance of certain truths without trust in Christ as Savior. James is also not saying that a person is saved by works and not by genuine faith. Rather, he is saying, to use Martin Luther's words, that a man is justified (declared righteous before God) by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. Genuine faith will produce good deeds, but only faith in Christ saves. (For more information on justification see note on Ro 3:24.) (CSB)

During the Reformation, this passage became controversial because some interpreters viewed it as teaching justification through faith and works (synergism). Critical interpreters have viewed the passage as evidence that the apostles James and Paul taught conflicting doctrines. The notes here carefully consider the text, revealing that James is addressing a misunderstanding about faith (v 14) and for that purpose uses some terms differently than the apostle Paul, though not in conflict with Paul's teaching. (TLSB)

2:14–17 The Christian faith is a living, active faith. It reflects the same mind, spirit, and attitude as Christ (Phil 2:1–11). If it does not, it is really not faith at all. James provides a single illustration to demonstrate the hypocrisy of such "faith." (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, p. 444, sees the "blessing" in v 16 as possibly a misapplication of Matt 6:25f.) Such faith obviously is not of Christ, for the believer in Christ seeks life, shares life, and is rewarded with the crown of life (Rev 2:10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

2:14 *someone says he has faith.* To this point, faith has been viewed positively (1:3, 6; 2:1, 5). In 2:14–26, James uses “someone” else’s definition of faith, which separates faith or belief in God from faithful living (v 18). Even demons have this kind of “faith” (v 19). Jesus likewise condemns those who “say” but do not “do” (Mt 23:1–6). (TLSB)

faith. Gk *pistis.* Usually used to mean trust, but here James means mere knowledge of a subject. (TLSB)

works? Actions done in response to justification, e.g., care of the needy (vv 15–16). (TLSB)

Can that faith save him? Mere intellectual assent is not saving faith, nor does it produce fruit in response to God’s gifts. (TLSB)

This passage is not opposed to Rom. 3, 21–28, but offers the opposite side of the question, the key to the entire discussion being given in v.17. The apostle first of all asks a challenging question: What is the advantage, my brethren, if one says he has faith, but has no works? Can that faith save him? The apostle here characterizes a person that has mere knowledge of the head, of the mind, concerning the facts of salvation, but is without the faith of the heart which is bound to be active in love. Real faith, saving faith, without some evidence of its presence in the heart, is unthinkable. Such faith has nothing in common with saving faith; such faith is a delusion and vanity. (Kretzmann)

2:15–17 In order to bring out his point, the apostle illustrates: If a brother or sister is ill clad and destitute of daily food, one of you, however, should say to them, Go your way in peace, be warmed and fed, but you would not give them the necessaries of the body, what good would it be to them? Here is a concrete case, which is met with all too often, also in our days of vaunted charity. A brother or a sister may be found in actual want, actually destitute of the needs of the body, insufficiently clad, undernourished or not nourished at all, and yet some people are satisfied with a pious wish that God would take care of their needs. If such a wish is made by one that is able to help, and there is actual need, then there is only one conclusion possible, namely, that such a person knows nothing of the real faith of the heart as it is bound to be active in love, in good works for the help of one’s neighbor. In a case of this kind the pious wish is an example of the rankest hypocrisy; for nothing but selfishness is able to neglect dire necessity as it is brought to the attention in circumstances of that kind. (Kretzmann)

2:15–16 This illustration of false faith is parallel to the illustration of false love found in 1Jn 3:17. The latter passage calls for love in action; this one calls for faith in action. (CSB)

poorly clothed. Lit, “naked.” Parallels Jesus’ teaching about the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:35–36). The needs of the neighbor are immediate and obvious. Mere lip service or empty, pious blessings accomplish nothing for those in need, nor do they reflect faith. (TLSB)

2:17 *faith.* The kind of knowledge described in vv 14, 19. (TLSB)

by itself. The issue here is wrongly separating faith from its natural fruit: good works (cf vv 18, 26). (TLSB)

2:18–19 If the Concordia/NIV Study Bible note is correct—that this verse quotes those who claim that there are “faith” Christians and “deeds” Christians—then James’ response may be that just as deeds expose faith, so faith exposes itself through deeds. Such “works” do not earn salvation, but rather are the natural product of true faith in Christ, “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The belief that God is one is the Old Testament creed, the Shema (Deut 6:4). James says that merely assenting to the creed is insufficient, since even the devils understand clearly enough who God is. Mark 1:24 is a clear illustration of this—the unclean spirit knew exactly who Jesus was. Knowledge alone does not save. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

2:18 *You have faith; I have deeds.* The false claim is that there are “faith” Christians and “deeds” Christians, i.e., that faith and deeds can exist independently of each other. (CSB)

Argument of those whom James is rebuking in this section. (TLSB)

Show me your faith without deeds. Irony; James denies the possibility of this. (CSB)

You have faith and I have works. Reverse of v 17. One cannot have right faith without the response of right works, nor can one do good works without faith. The problem is not that faith must have works to be real, but that some have separated faith from works (and works from faith). Faith cannot be separated from the response of works because the works naturally flow from the faith God plants. Cf 1:22–27. (TLSB)

The conclusion will therefore stand: Even so also faith, if it has not works, is dead, being by itself. Works are a necessary concomitant, an inevitable fruit of real faith. Spurious, hypocritical faith, then, being without works, is no faith; or if one wishes to assume that there was faith at one time, it is certain that such faith has died and is no longer able to bring forth real fruit in the shape of good works. A faith by itself, without good works, is simply unthinkable. (Kretzmann)

2:19 *God is one.* A declaration of monotheism that reflects the well-known Jewish creed called in Hebrew the *Shema*, “Hear” (Dt 6:4; Mk 12:29). (CSB)

James is addressing an early Christian congregation that strongly retains its OT identity and so quotes the OT’s basic confession of faith. Jesus cites this as the “most important” commandment (Mk 12:29), and Paul cites it to a Gentile audience as a foundational confession (1Co 8:6; Eph 4:6). (TLSB)

Even the demons believe. “Faith” and “believe” are based on Gk verb *pisteuo* (noun, *pistis*). Demons “believe” with the kind of “faith” James condemns in vv 14–26. Mere intellectual assent, which even the demons can (and must) have, is not a living faith and does not save. Luther: “It will profit you nothing to believe that Christ was delivered for the sins of other saints and to doubt that He was delivered for your sins. For both the ungodly and the demons believe this (James 2:19). No, you must take for granted in steadfast confidence that He was delivered for your sins too, and that you are one of those for whose sins He was delivered. This faith justifies you; it will cause Christ to dwell, live, and reign in you” (AE 27:172). Luther: “O it is a living, busy, active mighty thing, this [true] faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works” (AE 35:370). (TLSB)

2:20 *faith apart from works.* James is not discussing the relative value of works over and against faith, but the problem of separating faith and works. His argument is not that works are better than faith but that simple assent to certain beliefs is not truly faith. (TLSB)

2:21-25 The references to Abraham and Rahab serve as good sermon illustrations of faith active in love. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

2:21† Apart from its context, this verse might seem to contradict the Biblical teaching that people are saved through faith and not by good deeds (Ro 3:28; Gal 2:15–16). But James means only that righteous action is evidence of genuine faith—not that it saves, for the verse (Ge 15:6) that he cites (v. 23) to substantiate his point says, “Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it [i.e., faith, not works] to him as righteousness.” Furthermore, Abraham’s act of faith recorded in Ge 15:6 occurred before he offered up Isaac, which was only a proof of the genuineness of his faith. As Paul wrote, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:6). Faith that saves produces deeds. (CSB)

justified. “Justify” and “righteousness” are based on the same Gk word (see Paul’s usage, p 1903). This may mean “counted righteous,” but it can also mean “shown to be righteous,” “recognized as righteous,” or “to live as a righteous person.” Jesus uses it in this way in Mt 11:19; 12:33–37. James is saying, in effect, “Was not Abraham our father shown to be a righteous person when he?...” Abraham had already believed God and been declared righteous in Gn 15:6, long before the episode in Gn 22 (cf Jas 2:23). (TLSB)

2:22 *completed.* Translated “perfect” in 1:4. The point here is the same: when facing trial, Abraham’s faith did not waver, and so his faith was shown to be mature and strong. Luther also describes these two kinds of righteousness: “When I have this [declared] righteousness within me, I descend from heaven like the rain that makes the earth fertile. That is, I come forth into another kingdom, and I perform good works whenever the opportunity arises” (AE 26:11). (TLSB)

2:23 *Scripture was fulfilled.* Abraham was righteous already (Gn 15:6), but later demonstrated, or “completed,” his righteousness (Gn 22). After this, God said, “Now I know that you fear God [i.e., have faith], seeing you have not withheld your son” (Gn 22:12). Certainly God knew that Abraham had faith, but now his faith had been demonstrated by his faithful work. (TLSB)

a friend of God. This designation (see 2Ch 20:7) further describes Abraham’s relationship to God as one of complete acceptance. (CSB)

In OT, only Moses is spoken of as a friend of God (Ex 33:11), but noncanonical Jewish literature also refers to Abraham this way. “Friend of God” is the opposite of “friend of the world” (Jas 4:4). (TLSB)

2:24 *not by faith alone.* Not by an intellectual assent to certain truths (see note on 2:14–26). (CSB)

2:25 *Rahab the prostitute.* James does not approve Rahab’s occupation. He merely commends her for her faith (see also Heb 11:31), which she demonstrated by helping the spies (Jos 2). (CSB)

Ancestor of Jesus (Mt 1:5) and model of faith (Heb 11:31). 1 Clement of Rome: “On account of her faith and hospitality, Rahab the harlot was saved” (ANF 1:8). Like Abraham, Rahab had faith (Jsh 2:9) before her actions in helping the messengers demonstrated her righteousness (TLSB)

2:26 James concludes this chapter by citing the fact that body and spirit cannot be separated without death. God created man as a unity; the two must go together, as they will again after the resurrection. In the same way, living faith and good works are inseparable. One without the other is dead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

spirit. Breath of life, not the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

dead. The body cannot live without the breath of life, and life cannot exist apart from the body. Neither can faith and works be separated. Chrysostom: “As faith without works is dead, so are works without faith dead” (MPG 53, p 31). Luther: “The works of faith … are those which are done out of the spirit of liberty and solely for the love of God” (AE 25:234). (TLSB)

2:14–26 James discusses a false understanding of faith: mere knowledge that has no application or effect on the one who has it. This faulty understanding is just as wrong as the opposite error: focusing on actions alone apart from faith in Christ. True faith and its response of true good works cannot be separated. Works naturally follow faith. God has given us a great gift—through Christ Jesus, He has forgiven us and declared us righteous and holy. He now blesses us by calling us to serve Him in the lives of those around us. A living faith leads us to gladly share with others what we have freely received in Christ. • By Your Spirit, grant me true faith, Lord, that Your name might be glorified through me. Amen. (TLSB)