

# James 2 Part 1

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good morning. Let's just pray, shall we? Father, we just pray now that you will reveal yourself through the Word. that you will inspire us and challenge us this morning from James, a book that speaks quite clearly on how we should live.

So just lead us and guide us in Jesus' name. Amen. Right, James 2. And James 2, I had originally going to take the whole chapter, but there's too much in it.

And so I've split it in two. So you've got part this week and part next week. But before we begin, we need to address a question that has puzzled Christians for centuries.

Faith and works, an apparent contradiction between Paul and James. When we read Paul, we hear, a person is justified by faith apart from works, works of the law.

Now, that's found in Romans 3.28. Yet when we read James, we hear, a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. James 2.24.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] Now, at first glance, they look like they're in disagreement. But they don't. They're not. Paul is answering the question, how is a sinner saved?

James is answering, what does saving faith look like that's genuine? Paul is fighting legalism. James is fighting an empty profession of faith.

He is addressing people who claim to have faith, yet whose lives show little evidence of spiritual transformation. Paul says, we are saved by faith alone.

James says that faith, the faith that saves, is never alone. Paul looks at the root. James looks at the fruit. Paul uses the word justify, primarily in a legal sense, and he explains how a sinner is declared righteous before a holy God.

James uses the word in the sense of being demonstrated or shown to be genuine. Paul asks, how is a man accepted by God? James asks, how can genuine faith be recognized?

[ 2 : 2 7 ] The two men are not opponents. They are allies defending the same gospel from different directions. One commentator described them as two doctors treating different patients.

Paul is treating the person who says, if I'm good enough, God will accept me. Paul replies to that, no salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Now James is treating the person who says, I prayed a prayer years ago, therefore it doesn't matter how I live now. James replies to that, no, genuine faith produces genuine change.

Paul is concerned with obtaining salvation. James is concerned with the evidence of salvation. Paul focuses on the entrance into the Christian life.

James focuses on the proof that the Christian life is real. The Reformers eventually summarize the relationship beautifully. It says, we are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that remains alone.

[ 3 : 3 6 ] That single sentence captures the heart of James chapter 2. Going on from that, Martin Luther famously struggled with this letter during the Reformation.

And at one point, he referred to James as an epistle of straw because he feared it undermined justification by faith alone. Yet, Luther eventually recognized that James was not contradicting Paul.

Paul was correcting those who trusted in works rather than in Christ. James was correcting those who claimed Christ without any evidence of transformation. So the two men are not enemies.

They stand shoulder to shoulder defending the same gospel. Now another criticism of the book of James, or raised against James, is that the name of Jesus only appears twice in the whole of the book of James.

In James 1 verse 1, and in James 2 verse 1. Some critics have therefore argued that James reads more like a Jewish ethical handbook than a Christian letter.

[ 4 : 4 5 ] Yet, while the name of Jesus appears only twice, the teaching of Jesus appears everywhere. For example, the Sermon on the Mount echoes throughout this book.

James speaks about humility, mercy, peacemaking, careful speech, practical obedience, caring for those in need, loving our neighbours.

These are all items found repeatedly in the teachings of Christ. Jesus may not be mentioned often by name, but his fingerprints are on every page. In many ways, James is showing us what life looks like when the teachings of Jesus are taken seriously.

Now that brings us to our first section, and we're going to read together, if you'd like to turn to James chapter 2, we'll read together verses 1 to 13.

My brothers and sisters, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favouritism. For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and is dressed in bright clothes, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in, and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright clothes, and say, you sit here in a good place, and you say to the poor man, you stand over there or sit down by my footstool.

[ 6 : 08 ] Have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil motives? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters, did God not choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he promised to those who love him?

But you have dishonoured the poor. It is not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court. Do they not blaspheme the good name by which you have been called?

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbour as yourself, you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as violators.

For whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all. For he who said, do not commit adultery, also said, do not murder.

Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a violator of the law. So speak, and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of freedom.

[ 7 : 17 ] For judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. And we'll have the rest of the chapter next week.

Imagine applying for a job and saying at the interview, I believe in hard work. In fact, I'm passionate about it. I admire people who work hard.

I read books about work. I enjoy talking about work. The job interviewer replies, that's wonderful.

Then he asks, have you ever actually worked?

That is essentially the question James asks throughout the chapter two. James is not interested merely in what we claim to believe. He wants to know what our faith looks like on Monday morning, on Tuesday, and throughout the rest of the week.

A key theme runs through this entire chapter, and it is, genuine faith is visible. Now, chapter two, verse one, James begins with a direct command.

[ 8 : 21 ] My brother, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. As we've already discovered in chapter one, a few weeks back, James does not waste words.

No lengthy introduction, no gentle build up, no easing us into the subject. He goes straight to the issue. Don't show favoritism, he says. The original word carries the idea of partiality, judging people by outward appearance.

Literally, it means receiving the face. James is not simply condemning outward acts of favoritism. He is exposing the heart behind them.

Partiality begins when we value people differently because of outward things. Favoritism is what happens when that hidden attitude is expressed in the way we treat them.

In other words, making decisions about people based on what we see on the outside rather than who they really are. It is a temptation as old as humanity itself.

[ 9 : 25 ] People judge by appearance. God judges by the heart. The world is impressed by wealth. God is impressed by faith.

The world notices status. God notices character. The world notices titles, achievement, influence, but God sees the condition of the heart.

There is something else worth noticing. James describes Jesus as the Lord of glory. This is one of the most exalted descriptions of Christ in the entire New Testament.

The one James is speaking about is not merely a good teacher, not merely a religious leader. He is the Lord of glory, the King of kings, the one before whom angels bow, the one through whom the

universe was created, the one who left heaven's glory to save sinners.

And James is effectively saying, how can those who belong to the Lord of glory judge people according to worldly standards? How can we worship a saviour who humbled himself and then exalt wealth, status and influence?

[ 10 : 37 ] How can we follow Christ while adopting the world's value system? It is the sin of partiality that James illustrates the problem. He says, a wealthy man enters the assembly wearing fine clothes and gold rings.

A poor man enters wearing shabby clothes. Immediately, the rich man receives special treatment, the best seat, the warmest welcome, the greatest attention.

Meanwhile, the poor man is told to stand over there or sit on the floor. James then asks a question. Have you not then made distinction among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Verse 4. Notice he does not say they have simply made a social mistake. He says they have become judges. They have taken upon themselves the role of deciding who matters most.

The problem goes far deeper than poor manners. It is a gospel issue. Consider the gospel inequality. The gospel teaches that every believer stands before God solely on grace.

[ 11 : 42 ] None of us enter God's kingdom because of our education, our intelligence, our wealth, our family background, or by our social standing.

We entered by grace alone. At the foot of the cross, every human distinction disappears. The millionaire and the pensioner, the professor and the laborer, the company director and the unemployed, the famous and the forgotten, all stand equally in need of mercy.

None can save themselves. All must come through Christ. So the cross is a great leveler. Paul says in Ephesians that Christ has broken down a dividing wall of hostility.

Yet whenever we show favoritism, we begin rebuilding barriers that Christ died to remove. Let us look at God's view of people. Verse 5.

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith? James is not teaching that poverty saves, nor is he teaching that wealth is sinful. Scripture contains godly poor people.

[ 12 : 48 ] And also godly wealthy people. We've got that in the Bible. Think of Abraham. He was wealthy. Job was wealthy. Lydia was wealthy. Joseph of Aramthea was wealthy.

The issue is not money. The issue is perspective. The world tends to overlook the poor, while God often works powerfully through those whom society ignores.

Think about the people Jesus chose. Fishermen, tax collectors, ordinary men from ordinary backgrounds. Paul reminds the Corinthians, not many of you were wise according to worldly standards.

Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. God delights in using ordinary people so that the glory belongs to him alone. So what does modern favoritism look like?

Most churches no longer reserve special seats for people wearing gold rings. But favoritism has not disappeared. It's simply changed clothes. Today we may judge people by the house they live in.

[ 13 : 53 ] The car they drive. The car they drive. Perhaps their education. Their accent. Their occupation. Even their appearance. Perhaps their nationality. Their achievements.

And sometimes we arrive at that opinion within seconds. Without realizing it, we can begin assigning values according to worldly standards.

Imagine two visitors arrive next Sunday. One arrives in a luxury car. Think of loads of luxury cars. The other arrives carrying everything he owns in two shopping bags.

Which receives the warmer welcome? James says, The answer to that question reveals far more about us than it does about them.

Churches can sometimes be challenging places. A newcomer arrives and receives three handshakes, two cups of tea, four invitations for lunch.

[ 14 : 52 ] Someone who has attended faithfully for ten years or more receives, Morning Fred, morning conversation over. We, ourselves, as Leo and myself, we've experienced this in other churches, but we're glad to say the time we've been here, we haven't seen that at all.

When we first arrived, we had a wonderful reception, and we thank you for that. Yet James reminds us that every person matters. We all matter to God. Also remember, every person is made in God's image.

Every person possesses eternal value. The image of God, perhaps, is the deepest reason of all. Every human being bears the image of God, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, successful or

unsuccessful, believer or unbeliever.

Every person you meet is an image bearer. If we open the early chapters of Genesis, they teach us that human beings are unique within creation because they have been created in God's image.

That image has been damaged by sin, but not destroyed, which means whenever we look down on another person, we are looking down on someone made by God and for God.

[16:08] Now that gives every human being dignity. It gives every human being value. They have eternal significance, and it means Christians should be the last people on earth to practice partiality.

For we know something the world often forgets. We know that people matter. Why? Because God says they matter. Not because of what they own, not because of what they achieve, not because of how they look, but because they bear his image.

Now as we go through the chapter, we're now coming to the royal law. James now moves from exposing the problem to providing the solution. In verse 8 it says, if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, you shall love your neighbor as yourself, and in that you're doing well. James calls this command the royal law. Why? Well, firstly, because it comes from the king. This is not simply good advice. It is not a helpful suggestion.

It is a command given by God himself. But there is something else worth noticing. James is quoting directly from Leviticus 19, verse 18.

[17:23] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. That is significant because only a few verses earlier, Leviticus also says, Do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

The command not to show favoritism and the command to love our neighbor belongs together. James is not changing the subject. He is showing us the heart of the issue. You cannot genuinely love your neighbor while treating him or her as less valuable than someone else.

Love and partiality cannot comfortably live together. The one eventually drives out the other. In Matthew 22, 37 to 40, This command became even more significant when Jesus asked, What is 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 then he added, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. And he concluded by saying, On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

Think about what that means. James is not discussing church etiquette. He is not discussing social skills. He is not simply teaching us how to be polite.

[18:40] He has taken us to the very heart of Christian living. The Christian life is not merely about avoiding certain sins. It is about learning to love. Love for God.

Love for people. Love that reflects the character of Christ. The challenge of loving others, Now if we're honest, Most of us find it relatively easy to love people who are easy to love.

People like the ones who agree with us. People who appreciate us. People who encourage us. Perhaps people who think like us.

The real test comes elsewhere. Can we love difficult people? Can we love people who annoy us? Can we love people who can do nothing for us?

Can we love those who have hurt us? Can we love those whom society overlooks? The rich man, of course, may be useful. The influential person may open doors.

[19:38] The successful person may improve our reputation. But Christian love asks a different question. Not what can this person do for me? But how can I serve this person for Christ?

That is exactly how God loved us. Romans 5 reminds us while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. God did not love us because we deserved it.

He loved us because he is gracious. Perhaps the greatest illustration of this principle is the good Samaritan. A man lies wounded by the roadside.

A priest passes by. He sees the problem and keeps walking. A Levite passes by. He sees the problem and keeps walking.

Then comes a Samaritan. The very person nobody expected to help. He stops. He binds the wounds. He provides transport. He pays the expenses.

[20:38] He becomes personally involved. The priest saw a problem. The Levite saw a problem. The Samaritan saw a person. And that is the difference. Love sees people.

Love gets involved. Love crosses barriers. Love costs something. Love acts. And that is precisely what James is calling for. Not sentimental feelings.

Not warm intentions. But practical love. Living love. Visible love. Then James goes on to talk about the seriousness of partiality.

He says something remarkably strong. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin. And are convicted by the law as transgressors. He calls it sin.

Why? Because partiality attacks the very principle of neighbor love. It elevates one person and diminishes another. It values people according to worldly standards rather than God's standards.

[ 21 : 39 ] And whenever we do that, we place ourselves in the position of judge. James reminds us that God's law is not a buffet from which we select the commandments we prefer.

The same God who says do not commit adultery also says do not murder. To break one part of God's law is to become accountable before the lawgiver himself.

James is not teaching that all sins have identical consequences. He is teaching that every sin is ultimately rebellion against the same holy God.

Which means none of us can stand before him boasting of our own righteousness. We all need grace. We all need mercy. And that leads, James, to one of the most wonderful statements in this chapter.

And that is mercy triumphs over judgment. Verse 13 says, Judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

[ 22 : 39 ] What a remarkable statement. In a letter filled with practical challenges, James suddenly shines a spotlight directly onto the heart of the gospel. To understand what he means, we need to be careful.

James is not saying that God's justice somehow disappears. The Bible never presents God as overlooking sin. The cross proves that. At Calvary, we see both the justice of God and the mercy of God meeting together.

God did not simply ignore our sin. He judged it. But he judged it on his son. Justice was satisfied. Mercy was extended. And that is why the cross stands at the center of the Christian faith.

Without justice, there is no righteousness. Without mercy, there is no hope. At the cross, both are perfectly displayed. We are people who have received mercy. James is writing to believers.

People who have experienced God's grace. People who know what it means to be forgiven. And his argument is simple. How can those who have received mercy become merciless towards others?

[ 23 : 46 ] How can those whose sins have been forgiven refuse to forgive? How can those who live by grace become harsh and unforgiving? The Bible repeatedly teaches that forgiven people should become forgiving people.

Recipients of mercy should become distributors of mercy. Let's think about David. After his terrible sins involving Bathsheba and Uriah, David stood guilty before God.

And if God had dealt with him purely according to justice, David would have been lost. Yet David found mercy. What about Peter? The man who boldly declared he would never deny Christ.

And then denied him three times. Peter deserved judgment. Instead, he re-received restoration. The risen Christ sought him out, forgave him and recommissioned him.

Think about the prodigal son. After wasting his inheritance and disgracing his family, he returned home expecting rejection. Instead, he found a father running towards him.

[ 24 : 50 ] A robe, a ring, a welcome, mercy. Again and again, Scripture tells us the same story. Broken people finding grace. Guilty people finding forgiveness.

Lost people finding restoration. And if that's how God has treated us, should it not affect how we treat others? Remember the story of the unforgiven servant.

Jesus told a powerful, perfectly illustrates James' point. A servant owed his master an impossible large debt. In fact, a debt he could never repay.

When he pleaded for mercy, the master forgave the entire amount. But then, if you remember, the same servant found a fellow servant who owed him a smaller amount.

Instead of showing mercy, he demanded payment. And when the payment could not be made, he had the man thrown in prison. The contrast is shocking. A man was forgiven a large amount of money while refusing to forgive his fellow servant a lot smaller amount.

[ 25 : 53 ] Yet that is exactly what happens whenever Christians forget the mercy they have received. When we lose sight of grace, we become harsh. When we lose sight of grace, we become critical.

When we lose sight of grace, we become unforgiving. Mercy flows naturally from the hearts that remember how much they have been forgiven. Speaking and acting as those under grace. James then says, So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. And that's an interesting phrase, the law of liberty.

At first, those words seem contradictory. We normally think of law as restricting freedom. Yet James says God's law brings liberty. Why? Because he is speaking about the transforming work of God in the believer's life.

Before Christ, sin was our master. We were free to sin, but not free from sin. Now through Christ, we are free to obey, free to love, free to serve, free to become what God created us to be.

[ 27 : 00 ] The law no longer stands over the believer as a sentence of condemnation. Instead, it becomes a guide for grateful obedience. We obey not to earn God's favor.

We obey because we have already received it. That is why James says, Speak and act as people who belong to Christ. Speak as people who know mercy.

Act as people who know mercy. Treat others. What James means when he says, Mercy triumphs over judgment. He means that where genuine saving faith exists, Mercy becomes one of its distinguishing marks.

Merciful people reveal that they have understood the gospel. Unmerciful people reveal they have not yet grasped the magnitude of God's grace. One writer put it this way.

The Christian is simply one beggar showing another beggar where bread may be found. That's true. None of us stand before God on the basis of our treatments.

[ 28 : 02 ] None of us deserve his grace. Every prayer we pray is heard because of mercy. Every sin forgiven is forgiven because of mercy. Every blessing received is received because of mercy.

Every hope we possess rests upon mercy. And James therefore reminds us that mercy should characterize the people of God. This does not mean abandoning truth.

It does not mean ignoring sin. It does not mean refusing to exercise discernment. But it does mean remembering how God has dealt with us.

Patience, graciously, compassionately, and mercifully. And when God's people begin to show that same mercy to others, something beautiful happens. Favoritism begins to disappear.

Pride begins to disappear. Judgmental attitudes begin to disappear. And because mercy sees people differently, mercy sees people through the lens of the gospel.

[ 29 : 01 ] Mercy sees merely, not merely what a person is today, but what God can make them by his grace. And that prepares us perfectly for the next section.

James has shown us that genuine faith does not show favoritism. Now he asks some more searching questions. Can faith exist at all if it never changes the way we live?

As we draw this first section of James chapter 2 to a close, It's worth reminding ourselves that James has not really been talking about the rich people and the poor people.

He has been talking about the heart. The temptation to value people according to the standards of the world rather than the standards of God. The temptation to see wealth where God sees faith.

To see status where God sees character. To see appearance where God sees the heart. James reminds us that every person we meet bears the image of God.

[ 30 : 01 ] Every person matters to him. Every person possesses eternal significance. The wealthy businessman. The lonely widow. The successful professional. The struggling single parent.

The confident visitor. The awkward newcomer. The mature believer. The person still searching for answers. All stand equally in need of grace. And all are equally welcome at the foot of the cross.

And that is why partiality is so serious. It contradicts the very gospel we claim to believe. For God did not choose us because of our worthiness. He chose us because of his mercy.

And because we have received mercy, we are called to show mercy. James leaves us with a searching challenge. When people encounter us, do they encounter the values of the world?

Or do they encounter the mercy of Christ? Do they see favoritism? Or do they see grace? Do they see judgment? Or do they see mercy? For James has reminded us of one of the great truths of scripture.

[ 31 : 07 ] Mercy triumphs over judgment. May that mercy shape our hearts, our attitudes, our relationships. Until the character of Christ becomes increasingly visible in us.

As we finish this morning, James has challenged us about how we view other people. Do we show favoritism? Do we love our neighbor? Do we show mercy as we ourselves have received mercy?

Next time, next week, James takes us even deeper. For if genuine faith changes how we treat people, what does genuine faith actually look like?

Can a person claim to have faith and yet remain unchanged? Can faith exist if it never produces action? Can correct doctrine exist without genuine salvation?

And why does James say that even demons believe? These are questions waiting for us in the second half of chapter 2. Questions that are just as relevant today as they were 2,000 years ago.

[ 32 : 05 ] James' answers may surprise us. James has also shown us that genuine faith does not play favorites. Next week, he asks an even more searching question. What if a person claims to have faith, knows all the right answers, believes all the right doctrines, and is still lost?

James' answer may be one of the most challenging in the entire New Testament, but we'll pick that up, Lord willing, next week. Let's just pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word and for the challenge of James chapter 2.

We confess that too often we can be influenced by outward appearances, social status, wealth, educational position. Forgive us when we have shown favoritism, whether knowingly or unknowingly, and help us to see people as you see them.

Lord Jesus, thank you that when we came to you, you did not judge us by our achievements, possessions, or importance in the eyes of the world. You welcomed us by your grace and showed us mercy when we deserved judgment.

Help us this week to fulfill the royal law, to love our neighbors as ourselves. Give us eyes to notice those who are overlooked, lonely, struggling, or forgotten. Make us a church that reflects your heart, a place where every person is valued, welcomed, and loved.

[ 33 : 21 ] Teach us to speak and act as people who have been set free by your grace. May our words be kind, our actions be compassionate, and our attitude honor you.

And where we are tempted to be critical, make us merciful. Where we are tempted to judge, make us gracious. Where we are tempted to overlook others, make us attentive and caring.

And Father, as we lead today, remind us that mercy triumphs over judgment. May we be people who have received your mercy, and who gladly extend that same mercy to others.

Bless us, guide us, and use us for your glory in the days ahead. In the precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.