

James
Chapter Two
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We continue our study of James with the fourth test.

IV. The Test of Impartial Love (2:1-13)

James 2:1 “My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

James 2:2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

James 2:3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine 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,"

James 2:4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

I am sorry to say that I have seen this favoritism occur many times since I have been attending local church meetings. Following are a few examples:

- One Sunday before we obtained a new pastor one of our church members, who is now a deacon, brought into the congregation a man running for the U.S. Senate. The service was stopped as the politician was introduced and Carol and I felt like running out of the room. This episode was certainly a “man with the golden ring” event.
- I saw in another church the new President of the town university and his family introduced and given a pew close to the front (to his credit, he and his family did not return). Again I was very embarrassed.
- In another situation when I was a teenager I sat in another family’s pew. They came down the aisle, stopped and looked at me, and told me that I was sitting in their pew. Embarrassed, I got up and moved.
- In another situation, I was a greeter in a church and a black family came to the front door while I was standing there. I greeted them and led them down to a pew. When I got back to the front door, a white family came stomping past me and as they were leaving the husband cursed me for letting the blacks come into the church.
- In another church we felt so very good when a handicapped black woman was accepted as a member into the church even though the membership was predominantly white. However it was not long after that when the pastor left under circumstances that we never understood.
- I was a deacon in the last church above and I went on some visitations with a big black friend who also had a beard. He and I visited houses occupied by white people in a small Mississippi town and I did not think anything about it although no other white person would go with him. Carol said that we were fortunate that

the police were not called! In this church there were maybe 10 black people and 200 white people. But the church had a ministry to handicapped people and a blind, crippled young man was in our SS class. One night we helped this man up the platform so that he could sing "Amazing Grace". The song was not well done from a musical standpoint, but it was beautiful. This church had a good mix of people, but unfortunately was "run" by some powerful white people who apparently dismissed the pastor and started changing the church. These people also objected to our allowing the blind, crippled person sing from the stage. It was never the same.

What is happening in those situations where the "man with the golden ring" is shown preferential treatment? Certainly in such situations the church is looking very much like the world. Does God show favoritism to those who are among the "best accepted people in a particular area"? Certainly God does not show any favoritism among people. God is the same forever and ever as we see confirmed on this topic in an Old Testament scripture:

Lev 19:15 "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly."

Also note above that we are to judge our neighbor fairly rather than to not judge our neighbor. Some more Scripture verses also repeat this same warning against showing partiality:

2Chron 19:7 "Now then let the fear of the Lord be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the Lord our God will have no part in unrighteousness, or partiality, or the taking of a bribe."

Mal 2:9 "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways, but are showing partiality in the instruction."

Why does Jesus tell us in one quotation to not judge people and in another quotation to judge people?

Not Judge:

Matt 7:1 "Do not judge lest you be judged."

Matt 7:2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."

Judge:

John 7:24 "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Jesus is quoted by Matthew as telling us how not to judge rather than to not judge. He is telling us not to judge by our standards and if we do judge by our standards then those standards will be used by God against us. I would hope that nobody would want a righteous God to judge us according to the worldly judgment that we use.

Jesus is quoted by John as telling us how to judge. We are to judge by righteous judgment and, of course, by “righteous” He means God’s judgment standard. We can judge that someone who has killed someone else is guilty against God. Of course all judgment by us should begin against us.

The world naturally looks and judges by appearance. It is well known that a tall man has a much better chance of “success” in obtaining influential positions than a shorter man. *1Samuel 16:7 “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.””*

People also naturally reject fat people and any person who looks too different than they look. Children are crueler in their judgment of other children and adults than adults, but the adults, in general, have just learned how to better hide their judgment. It is too bad that we say things like “he is a big man” or “he is a little man”. We should all try to withhold any type of immediate impression of people by their appearance as we try to see their heart. After we get to know someone he may be a little man in a big body or a big man in a little body. What should matter, even to the worldly person, is the heart of each person. Of course only God can totally see a person’s heart, but we can look at works as James is teaching us. If you know someone who preferentially treats the man with the golden ring, then you have seen a part of his true nature. Often the reason someone gives preferential treatment to a person of worldly power is to try to build up his own reputation. The deacon who introduced the man running for office to the church was really saying “look at me, I know John and he knows me so I am important also”. The deacon was partially revealing that he was a person with a spiritual need. I was embarrassed that he was elected a deacon, and I hope that he was not elected because of his friendship with the congressman.

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

James 2:6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

James 2:7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

We need to all apply the Scripture to all of our reasoning and actions. God certainly did choose the poor and weak Jews to carry the seed of faith (the humanity of the Christ) and to carry forth the Word of God.

Deut 7:7 “The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,

Deut 7:8 but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

I probably would have chosen the most powerful people in the world to carry forth my desires for the world for I would think that they would have the best chance of

succeeding. I probably would have chosen Egypt or the Philistines and boy would I have been wrong! God chooses the weak so that He will be glorified rather than the people that the world thinks is the strongest.

2Cor 12:9 "And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

We have no physical description of Samson in the Bible, but the people were amazed at his strength. My wife, Carol, thinks that Samson probably looked like Don Knox the actor who played a wimpy deputy in a TV show. Don had a very skinny body. Certainly Samson got carried away by his physical abilities and did not glorify God until the end of his life. Whether or not we have some natural abilities that allow us to be successful, we need to remember to always give all the glory of our worldly success to the Lord. Just as God disciplined Samson, He may discipline us if we get carried away with our achievements and act contrary to our Christian nature.

*1Cor 1:26 "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;
1Cor 1:27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
1Cor 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,
1Cor 1:29 that no man should boast before God.
1Cor 1:30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,
1Cor 1:31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.""*

The older I get the more I know that it is indeed God who has worked in me all of my life so that He would be glorified and I better understand how very weak I was and still am. Praise the Lord.

James tells us in verses 6 and 7 that not only do we dishonor poor people when we are prejudiced against them; the very ones that we honor are the same ones that generally are involved in oppressing us. James may have been referring here to the Sadducees, who gave the Christians a lot of trouble and slandered the name of Jesus. The Sadducees did not believe in life after death, heaven or hell, or any angels or other spiritual beings although they claimed to follow the Mosaic Law.

Certainly "by which you have been called" is in reference to the people who were called in the name of Jesus. The word Christian means "Christ's ones".

We can certainly apply these verses to our times for we today are very much ridiculed by the world because of our belief in the resurrected Jesus and because we put all of our trust in Him. The papers are full of statements of ridicule of us because we believe that God created the universe and all life. They also take us to court to make Cobb County remove

the stickers in the biology textbooks proclaiming evolution to be a theory and not a fact. Many scientific societies have taken stands against the foolishness of people who want to teach our children an alternative theory to evolution. Although there are an increasing number of scientists who are becoming believers, the dominant scientific claim is that it is the “right” that are causing our children to be ignorant of “real” science.

Some of you may have seen an article on the Religion page of the Marietta paper June 12, 2005 about a former atheist, Antony Flew, who now has been convinced by science that a God really exists. He is now a theist, but not a Christian. He certainly is going in the right direction and may soon recognize this god as God. My cousin also sent me an article from Forbes Magazine written by Paul Johnson, who is also convinced that there must be a God. It is so interesting to me that the recent FACTS of science are convincing people that there must be a divine presence in the universe who created life and the universe. People have to be willing to let go of their giant egos to really look at the scientific facts and to then relate them properly to the world. Of course, Romans 1 tells us that nobody has an excuse because God has revealed Himself to all people. Unfortunately the little minds can make a lot of noise (evidence the recent evolution/sticker problem in Cobb) and can still wield a lot of power in our country. Many of the people making the most noise about the creation/evolution issue are people who either have no scientific training or are unpublished scientifically trained people who retired from science a long time ago. Why in the world would so many “lay people” believe the ignorant and weak in this argument? It is not so strange that people will believe in the God of the Bible, but what is truly strange is what people will believe! Pride!

James 2:8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

James 2:9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”

What James calls “the royal law” is the totality of the Word of God. The Word can be summarized as seen below:

Matt 22:37 “And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

Matt 22:38 "This is the great and foremost commandment.

Matt 22:39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

Matt 22:40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.””

Rom 13:10 “Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.”

Jesus also clearly revealed the importance of love in the giving of the 11th commandment:

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Showing partiality to the worldly people and to the rich and powerful in the congregation of believers is a terrible sin because that kind of action is completely opposed to how God works His plan. John also tells us that our actions speak concerning our heart:

1John 3:16 "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1John 3:17 But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

1John 3:18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

Of course there are people that do deserve our respect. As an aged one, I will start with a commandment concerning such people.

Lev 19:32 "You shall rise up before the grayheaded, and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord."

1Thes 5:12 "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction,

1Thes 5:13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another."

1Peter 2:17 "Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

There are also relationships among laborers that must be honored as stated below. These verses apply to us in our working relationship with our bosses and with those that work under us.

Eph 6:5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ;

Col 3:22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Col 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

1Tim 6:1 Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against.

We should be the best employees and employers as we do all as unto the Lord. Honoring the position of people in the world is worthy because it is God who puts the people in their particular places. If we dishonor those people in places of authority over us we are dishonoring God.

Rom 13:1 “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Rom 13:2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

Rom 13:3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same;”

Showing partiality is not the same as showing honor. We show partiality when we give better things to some people over other people simply because of their positions in the world and so that we might obtain an improved worldly status. I must honor and respect authority over me, but if there is ever a choice between obeying man or obeying God, the choice should be clear to us.

Acts 5:29 “But Peter and the apostles answered and said, ‘We must obey God rather than men’.”

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

James 2:12 So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

James 2:13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”

James here chose two of the more heinous “social sins” to illustrate his point. In truth the breaking of any part of any law is sin and when we carefully examine all of the law in its spiritual as well as its physical context we easily see that we all have violated all of the law of God.

The Jews tended to view the law as disconnected entities and by obeying one they would obtain credits toward their account before God and that when they disobeyed one they would obtain debits in their heavenly account. At the end of their lives the total accounting would be to see which side of the ledger had the most entries. If the credits outweighed the debits then they would go to be with God when they died. Does this method of determining one’s after-death destination sound familiar? I think that it should sound familiar to many people and it certainly does to me for I heard that many times while I was physiologically aging. This sort of accounting reply I have heard many times when talking to people about life everlasting. Of course to adopt such a system says that the person has no real understanding of the holiness of God or of the sinfulness of man. None of us can ever obey any of the law in its spiritual meaning.

What is the “law of liberty”? This law is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which sets us free from bondage to sin and brings us into full fellowship with the Father as we are adopted as His children. If anyone thinks that such a law now means that we do not have to do any works then he/she needs to pay close attention to the writing of James. Faith without works is dead, as we will see.

Verse 13 is especially scary because the judgment of which he speaks is the final judgment of God. For those who have shown no mercy, they will only receive judgment. Praise God that mercy triumphs over judgment for although I deserve judgment, I will receive mercy because of the faith that God gave me in Jesus Christ. Jesus also told us that showing mercy resulted in receiving mercy:

Matt 5:7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

Of course, the mercy that we show is evidence of a true faith that has been given to us by God.

Now we come to our fifth test as revealed in the writings of James.

V. The Test of Righteous Works (2:14-26)

James 2:14 "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?"

James 2:15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

James 2:16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

James 2:17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself."

James asks a rhetorical question and then gives an example to illustrate his point. Anyone can say that they believe in Jesus, but anyone who really does believe in Jesus will obey His commands and live a life of true love. John tells us a time when some said that they believed in Jesus but Jesus knew their hearts and that they were not true believers:

John 2:23 "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs which He was doing.

John 2:24 But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,

John 2:25 and because He did not need anyone to bear witness concerning man for He Himself knew what was in man."

Just an intellectual acceptance of Jesus is not sufficient for one to say that he is a child of God. James has given us a number of examples of the type of works to which he refers in this passage: endurance, perseverance under trial, purity of life, obedience to Scripture, compassion for the needy, and impartiality and later he will mention acts of compassion, control of the tongue, humility, truthfulness, and patience. We must stress again that someone just trying to obey these works without true faith will fail for just as faith without works is dead, works without faith is dead. First God must transform a person and then the person will be dedicated to His Savior. Paul clearly tells us that first God works and then we walk in the ways of God:

Eph 2:8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph 2:9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

The above clearly tells us that the reason for our creation as His children is for us to do the good works that God has also prepared before the foundation of the world, "that we should walk in them".

There are many cases presented in Scripture of people who were not really believers and some are mentioned below.

1John 1:6 "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

1John 1:7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

1John 2:4 "The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him;

1John 2:5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:

1John 2:6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked."

We today also see people who seemed to profess Jesus as their Lord but when times become a little tough for them they leave. John tells us about them:

1John 2:19 "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."

The above also demonstrates the perseverance of the Saints. The true saints will remain true to the word of God and remain in obedience to their Lord, Jesus Christ. I am afraid that many people in our churches today have no intention of living a life dedicated to serving Jesus Christ. If we are truly a child of God we have made a covenant to never forsake loving and obeying Jesus. A marriage should be indicative of the same type of desire as we should begin a marriage with the understanding that we will never under any circumstances abandon our spouse. In my opinion there is no valid reason for a divorce. Neither adultery nor abandonment is grounds for breaking the covenant relationship that we have with our spouse. Just as our marriage should be for eternity, so should our relationship with Jesus. Unfortunately the marriage and the family, which should be worldly examples of our relationship with God, are no longer the sacred items that they should be. God have mercy on the U.S.A.

Verses 15 and 16 above remind me of people who, when they find out about a need for a person will say “I will pray for you, brother”. However you never see or hear from them again. Sometimes I will put out a prayer need on an email and then never hear anything from anyone on the email list. It does me good to have a return email later that asks about the need or to have someone ask me about the situation. When people follow up on the need it shows that they indeed have taken the request to heart and want to know more about the situation and to know if there is anything that they can do to help. It is also really amazing how people can cry over a TV show or a movie and then not be moved by real events to which they are exposed. The reaction of true believers to the needs of others is clearly stated in the following:

Acts 4:32 “And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them.

Acts 4:33 And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.

Acts 4:34 For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales,

Acts 4:35 and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.”

Jesus specifically taught us that we should have a special heart for fellow believers and that those who help them help Him and those who desert them also desert Him.

Matt 25:31 “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

Matt 25:32 “And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

Matt 25:33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.

Matt 25:34 “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Matt 25:35 ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;

Matt 25:36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’

Matt 25:37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You drink?’

Matt 25:38 ‘And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You?’

Matt 25:39 ‘And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’

Matt 25:40 “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

Matt 25:41 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels;

Matt 25:42 for I was hungry, and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink;

Matt 25:43 I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.'

Matt 25:44 "Then they themselves also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?'

Matt 25:45 "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

Matt 25:46 "And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

James 2:18 But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

James 2:19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

James really punches his truth home here! The devil and the demons were here when Jesus was here. They saw Him live here and die here and, unfortunately from their perspective, they also saw Him resurrected from the dead. They all believe, not because they were given faith to believe, but because they **saw** all of the events of the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However this wonderful event has no saving power for them and all that they can do is shudder at the truth and know that their time is limited.

I remember one time when I was a Board member in a church and the church organization had a kindergarten program. When the program was being discussed I asked if the children were taught the truth about who Jesus is. The director looked at me in consternation and said "we teach them about God". I read the above verses from the Bible and I was stoned with looks and words. It is safe in most towns to teach about God, but not safe to teach about Jesus. The devil himself loves religion but he hates true Christianity. At least the demons have the sense to shudder, but the atheists today have no shame and no fear, they only have the hate of Satan for the children of God. We see this hate in the venomous writings in newspapers today as people criticize God's people for their "simple belief".

James 2:20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

James 2:22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

James 2:23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

James 2:24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.

Martin Luther was repulsed by these verses about Abraham because he thought that James was echoing the Roman Catholic view of salvation by works and at first he was unable to accept the writing of James. However Martin Luther did later come to the understanding that James was not talking about the means of salvation but the outcome of salvation and then he was able to accept the writings of James. I also have known people who rejected this book for the same reason as Martin Luther did at first. I do not know if they now know that James was indeed talking about the required outcome of salvation, but I think that reading Romans and then James in proper context does indeed make the meaning of the book of James clear. Verse 21 seems to say that Abraham was justified before God by his works, but what James is saying is that Abraham's faith was justified before man. He actually makes such an interpretation clear at the beginning of verse 22 when he says that Abraham's faith and works were in concert with each other.

When James states in verse 22 that Abraham's faith was perfected, such people who reject James think that he means that Abraham's faith was complete and then salvation resulted. However James is really saying that Abraham's faith was fully expressed in his total obedience to God. None of us can obey God or even want to obey God unless God first gives us faith. But when we exercise our faith we can obey God and thus prove to ourselves and to others that our faith is real.

In verse 23 James makes it very clear that he is in total agreement with the teachings of the rest of Scripture as he says that Abraham's believe in God was put into his account as righteousness. God gives us faith and we then exercise that faith by believing in God. Without faith it is impossible for man to believe and obey, but having the faith also produces righteous works that all may see that we are children of God.

It is also worth mentioning at this point that Abraham was declared righteous by God long before this specific act of works with his son, Isaac. Thus it is obvious that James is talking about the righteousness of Abraham being made apparent before men and not before God.

James mentioned Abraham as our father and that is consistent with other writings. Paul's writings as recorded in Galatians make it clear that those who are children of God through faith are the true sons of Abraham:

Gal 3:7 "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

Gal 3:8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations shall be blessed in you."

Gal 3:9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

Paul's writings in the book of Romans also make this scenario extremely clear that the blessings through Abraham are not by the Law but through faith.

Rom 4:8 "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

Rom 4:9 Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness."

Rom 4:10 How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

Rom 4:11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them,

Rom 4:12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

Rom 4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Rom 4:14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

Rom 4:15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation."

We also see in James 2:23 that Abraham was called a friend of God. I have many times wished that I could be a consistent friend of God. Certainly Abraham did not live a sinless life and he messed up pretty good several times as recorded in Scripture in particular twice with his wife. If we depended only upon the works of our life none of us would be friends of God. However because of the works of Jesus our righteousness is assured before God and our sins are gone forever. Now we are on a walk of sanctification and it is in that walk that all of us should strain to be friends of God and to become even better friends of God. Spurgeon wrote an excellent little book on being a friend of God and I highly recommend it for reading⁵.

James ends this little section by saying **“You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone”** and we want to say “Good grief, here we go again. Just when we thought we had it all worked out, he messes it up again!” However we are again handicapped by our lack of knowledge of Greek. The Greek word used for justified can have two meanings. One of the meanings is to mean acquittal as to be declared innocent in a trial and that is what we generally mean when we use the word for we have been acquitted due to the work of Jesus on our behalf. However the second meaning of the word is vindication or proof of righteousness and that is how James is using the word here. We see Paul using the same meaning in the following:

1Tim 3:16 “And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.”

Jesus was Himself “justified” in the revealing in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, and believed on in the world. All of these actions are before others and is the meaning of James. Our works are proof of our righteousness before ourselves and before others.

James 2:25 And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

James 2:26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

When we understand the way James is using the word “justified” then verse 25 also is consistent with all the other writings about being justified before God by faith and justified before man by our works. Of course Rahab is praised, not for her lying, but for her belief in God:

Josh 2:8 “Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,

Josh 2:9 and said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.

Josh 2:10 "For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

Josh 2:11 "And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

Rahab and Abraham are then praised in the “God’s hall of fame” (Heb: 11, 8, 17, 31) and she was the great-grandmother of Jesus (Matt 1:5).

James then goes on to clarify his meaning by saying that faith without works is dead, or not true faith. James is also echoing the words of Paul to the Ephesians about a body without a spirit being dead.

Eph 2:4 “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

Eph 2:5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Eph 2:6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus,

Eph 2:7 in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Eph 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph 2:9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

I love these verses because they so clearly tell us the entire Gospel message. We were dead because we had no spirit **but** God made us alive and seated us in Heaven spiritually so that we could then walk in the good works that God prepared for us here. We were not saved just for our own sake but for the glory of God. Verse 10 of Ephesians 2 clearly

states that we were created in Christ Jesus for good works. We cannot boast in our works but our works clearly show to the world the truth about Christ Jesus as we walk in the works created for us before the foundation of the world. Paul and James certainly preached the same message!

Amen!

References

1. All Bible quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, Moody Press, 1975.
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