**Faith Without Deeds is Dead**

James 2:1-26

Key Verse 26

*26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

## Introduction

In this passage, the Holy Spirit inspired James to write what many would consider a controversial statement, *“You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.”* On the surface this statement seems to contradict other parts of the Bible like Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.”*

However, James’ teachings are not contradictory at all. The Lord always has and always will look at our faith in Jesus for justification and righteousness. In no ways does James change this. Rather, the wisdom of God, given to James, adds important color to the picture. God reveals through him that “faith” can be “dead” or living based on whether deeds/actions are working with it. Faith that is dead due to being incomplete, doesn’t qualify before God. Faith made complete by action is the category of faith that God uses.

At the heart of James’ teaching is a unique insight; that faith and deeds are inseparably linked. Although some try to separate them into two topics (18a), James shows that Deeds have a transformative relationship to Faith, making Faith living or dead (7,26).

Let’s focus (as James does) on understanding the inseparable relationship between faith and deeds.

Look at v.1-6.

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

1. Describe the “favoritism” happening in James’ scenario. What is favoritism’s relationship to judging; why is it sinful? Why were the “poor” especially mistreated by this favoritism of the “rich” (5,6)?

**Describe the “favoritism” happening in James’ scenario.**

* In James’ scenario, a rich man comes into the church and gets “special attention” and is directed to a “good seat”. Conversely, a poor man, wearing filthy old clothes, is not treated with the same esteem and is told to “stand there” or to “sit on the floor by my feet”.
* This favoritism towards the rich man began when he first walked through the door. It’s not hard to imagine that the favoritism would continue forward into every future opportunity and consideration.
* The “poor man” would always be limited and treated less on account of his poverty. While the “rich man” is given advanced opportunities only because he is rich.

**What is favoritism’s relationship to judging; why is it sinful (4)?**

* “Favoritism” is an act of judgement. Specifically, it’s a value judgement,
  + *Value judgement* — a judgment of the inherit worth of someone or something, especially in a comparison to something else. Value judgements are based upon a particular set of values or value system.
  + By showing favoritism, the church inadvertently assigned value to each man—the rich man’s value being high and the poor man’s value as being low.
* “Favoritism” makes Christians become “judges with evil thoughts”
  + Every judge has thoughts and uses those thoughts to generate their judgement. If the judge has evil thoughts, his judgment will be unjust and ignoble. Likewise, the church in James’ scenario, had used evil thoughts (worldly standards) to make a value judgement of the rich man and the poor man. This was altogether wrong.
  + Christians need to run from becoming “judges” because Jesus emphatically warned against it and taught about the ramifications.
    - “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. — Matthew 7:1-2
  + Christians aren’t in the business of making value judgements of any class, race, nationality, gender, etc. We can never say that one group is inherently more valuable than another. Doing so is to become “judges with evil thoughts.”
  + God does not show favoritism, he does not put value on one group over another. Scripture expresses this in many places.
    - “Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism —Acts 10:34
    - “For God does not show favoritism.” —Romans 2:11
    - “Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.” — Colossians 3:25

**Why were the “poor” especially mistreated by this favoritism of the “rich” (5,6)?**

* God chose the “poor” to be rich in faith. Paul also wrote of God’s unique choosing,
  + “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,” —1 Corinthians 1:27-28
* This favoritism “dishonored” the group that God had chosen while it gave honor to the group who “exploited,” “sued” and “blasphemed.”
* There shouldn’t be any favoritism (rich or poor) but this favoritism was especially backwards in that it honored those who “blaspheme” and dishonored those who were “chosen by God.”

**What fundamental law was this “favoritism” breaking (8,9)?**

* The favoritism of the rich was a “sin” and breaking of the law to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” It was a sin against the poor because it dishonored them by presenting their value as being less than others.

**Why does James call it the “royal law found in Scripture”?**

* James’ expression, “royal law” shows his positive view of God’s law to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This law is “royal” in nature, its origins are from the King, its purposes are noble. It’s a law of love and is the way for “doing right” for all who abide by it.

**Why was it such a big deal to show favoritism? (9-11)**

* It’s easy to dismiss a little favoritism and not think it’s that big of a deal.
* However, James shows it was an extremely big deal because the sin of favoritism was breaking God’s law and was thereby “breaking all of it.”
  + For example, if there are 100 laws and someone keeps 99 of them. They would likely say, “Look, I keep 99% of the laws I’m clearly a ‘law keeper.’ Breaking the 1 law is overshadowed by keeping the 99 laws.” However, James shows that breaking even 1 law is “guilty of breaking all of it.” It is therefore a very big deal to break the “royal law” by showing favoritism and should be immediately corrected as such.

**What standards will Christian’s be judged by (12)?**

* Every believer will face a judgment of their deeds and will have to give an accounting of their life, what they did in the body and for what they said with their tongue.
* James exhorts the reader to “speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.” This shows that James saw the law as a positive standard of conduct that “gives freedom.” James’ view is that following the “royal law,” the “law that gives freedom” is a means to prepare for the coming judgement of our deeds and motives.

**What is the way to overcome this coming judgement (13)?**

* Being merciful to others is the way to experience mercy in the coming judgement. If we are merciful to others and hard on ourselves we will do much better than our natural tendency to be hard on others and merciful to ourselves.
* Since love is the fulfillment of the law, a life devoted to loving our neighbor as ourself will lead to success and freedom in the coming judgement.

**Look at v.14-17.**

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

**Describe the scenario James puts forth in these verses.**

* James puts forth a scenario where a brother or sister is in need and someone tells them “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed” but then doesn’t take action to make those things come about. James says, “what good is it?” for someone to say good things but not take action to bring about those good things.

**Why does faith need to be accompanied by action (17)?**

* Faith can’t be just about good sounding words or about attaining knowledge. Every facet of faith has practical situations where it can be expressed in this world.
* Faith exists in the mind and heart but situations arise where this faith can/should be acted on and thereby informs decisions, plans, actions and deeds in the real world.
* If someone’s faith is missing “deeds” it is “dead” and James even asks the question: “Can such faith save them?”

**How does the law to “Love your neighbor as yourself” apply to this scenario?**

* Loving our neighbor as ourself, is James top concern for faith in action.
* His scenario shows that practically loving others with tangible actions is an area of concern. Evidently, James saw an issue in the church where people claimed faith in Jesus but didn’t practice (by action) love to the lost outside of the church (widows and orphans) or love towards brothers and sisters through serving and helping with their needs.

**Look at v.18-19. What does James imply some people want to do with the relationship between “faith” and “deeds”?**

* People want to separate “faith” and “deeds” and treat them as if they are unique, unconnected topics. James shows people’s attempt to do this by stating, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have deeds.’”

**Is it possible to “show” faith apart from showing deeds?**

* No, it is impossible to “show” someone your faith by merely talking about what you believe in.
* James pronounces an important truth: deeds/actions show what our faith is in. James refutes the attempt to isolate the two into separate topics by his response, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

**Why does James mention the belief of demons?**

* Here, James puts forth a surprising perspective, that demons (vile, wicked enemies of God) believe the same things that Christians believe (even the truth of the Trinity) but “believing” these things doesn’t make them stop being evil and become children of God.
* The implication here is that agreeing to the Biblical truths and even having mental, moral agreement is nothing more than what demons have. Shocking!

**Look at v.20-24. Describe James’ reference to the life of Abraham.**

* Abraham is the “Father of Faith” and his life is a critical example in understanding God’s truth that righteousness is by faith.
* James also uses the life of Abraham to explain that the deeds of Abraham were instrumental to his righteousness. Not that the deeds were what God used for his righteousness but that Abraham’s faith was qualified as a living faith (rather than “dead” faith).

**What does James mean that Abraham’s faith and his actions were working together?**

* Abraham’s faith led to actions and these actions made his faith come alive. The two were inseparable and synergetic.
* Paul also wrote of this synergy between faith and deeds when he penned, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” —Galatians 5:6

**How can James say that a person is “righteous by what they do and not by faith alone”?**

* It seems that James witnessed Christian’s abusing the doctrine of righteousness by faith. Instead of doing good they were doing wrong by (1) using their tongue in horrible ways, (2) neglecting the command to love their neighbor as themselves—turning a blind eye to other’s needs and showing favoritism (3) acting as friends of the world and living in sinful ways.
* These believers didn’t have a sense of problem about their evil behavior because they were deceived that their actions weren’t important; since God only cares about faith deeds don’t matter.
* However, James carefully showed us that “faith without deeds is dead.” Therefore, the Christians who were casually living their lives should start thinking about how to practice the faith they espoused to have.

**Look at v.25-26. James references the life of Rahab the prostitute. What was Rahab’s original faith (Joshua 2:8-11)?**

* Rahab’s faith is found in a couple of her statements including: (1) “I know that the Lord has given you this land…” (2) “…the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”
* There’s evidence that many people in Jericho had formed a similar faith as Rahab on account of the miraculous power the Lord was displaying through the Israelites.

**How did Rahab make her faith into a living faith that was considered “righteous”?**

* Rahab acted on her faith by hiding the spies who came into the land.
* By her actions she was helping God’s people and made a statement that she believed what God was going to do and thereby made her faith into a living faith.

**Describe in your own words the meaning of v.26.**

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