



INTRO

In James, we continue to look at Jesus as the *Perfect Law* (1:25). The summary verse for all of reviveSCHOOL is Matthew 5:17: “Don’t assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” In fulfilling the Law, Jesus is the *Perfect Law*. The question in James is - once we have this freedom in Christ, what do we do with it.

TEACHING

James 2:1-13: Wiersbe summarizes the first four verses as, “The Deity of Christ.”¹ First, how believers can hold on to faith in Christ and yet show favoritism to others (v. 1). This verse is a proverb or a mini-sermon. Verses 2–4 gives the illustration of two men coming to a church meeting—one rich and one poor. If the rich man was shown partiality and the poor man was treated rudely, believers had judged the poor man through evil thoughts. That means we have looked with our eyes and decided one is better than the other, based on appearance and possibly what one could do for us.

Nelson’s Commentary gives four reasons believers should not show favoritism:

1. God accepts the poor without judgment on their situations (v. 5).²
2. The rich can use their fortunes to oppress others, especially believers (vv. 6–7).³ “The noble name” refers to believers who had been baptized in Christ (v. 7).
3. Showing partiality breaks God’s Law to love others (vv. 8–11).⁴ “The royal law” is, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (v. 8). We are called to love both the rich and the poor. But, if we show favoritism, we sin against God. Verse 10 reminded the believers that they could not keep the laws completely anyway. And, we cannot pick and choose the laws we keep and ignore (v. 11).

Nelson’s Commentary explains that some Pharisees had been guilty of this: “They carefully observed some of the requirements of the Law, such as keeping the Sabbath, and ignored others, such as honoring their parents. Sin is violation of the perfect righteousness of God, who is the Lawgiver.”⁵ James addressed believers who had been dispersed throughout the known world, and persecution was taking place everywhere they were. Possibly, they were showing favoritism to the rich in an attempt to avoid persecution themselves. James did not want the believers to be hypocrites by looking out for their own needs, rather than showing God’s love for others.

4. Those who break God’s Law will be judged by Him (vv. 12–13).⁶ Instead of worrying about being judged by the rich, they were to conduct themselves in the way they spoke and acted as under God’s law of freedom (v. 12). *Nelson’s Commentary* states, “Believers will be judged by the law of liberty, which is the law of love. Believers who do not practice partiality, but practice love and mercy, will triumph at the judgment seat. Those who have not shown mercy will not receive mercy.”⁷ The reality is that we should be showing love and mercy to all.

James 2:14–19: Martin Luther, one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, developed the doctrine of salvation that states our salvation can only come through faith alone. Luther called James an “epistle full of straw” in the introduction of his New Testament in 1522 and put the book of James in the appendix rather than in the body of Scripture. Luther preferred Paul’s statement of faith (Romans 3:28). *Nelson’s Commentary* states that Luther had no choice in this position because “he was surrounded by men who said that good works could save you. He knew that God alone could save through faith alone.”⁸

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Exposition Bible Commentary* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1989), p. 350.

² Earl Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, and H. Wayne House, eds., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p. 1665.

³ *Nelson’s Commentary*, p. 1665.

⁴ *Nelson’s Commentary*, p. 1665.

⁵ *Nelson’s Commentary*, p. 1665.

⁶ *Nelson’s Commentary*, p. 1665.

⁷ *Nelson’s Commentary*, p. 1666.

⁸ *Nelson’s Commentary*, p. 1666.



Perfect Law

DON'T SHOW FAVORITISM

James 2

Teaching Notes

James “was taking aim at freeloaders, those who claimed to have no need for good deeds since they had faith. The reality is that if you have faith, works will naturally be a product.”⁹ *Nelson’s Commentary* points out that just because believers are not saved by works does not mean they can stop doing them: “You cannot sever the effect from the cause. Just as an apple tree will bear apples, so faith will produce good works (Luke 6:43–44).”¹⁰ Rather than seeing faith and works as enemies, they can be seen as working together. “They are two parts of God’s work in us. Faith brings a person to salvation, and works bring that person to faithfulness. Faith is the cause, works are the effect.”¹¹

In verse 14 James asked what good it does if someone says they have faith but have no works. What good does it do to give empty platitudes to people who are hungry, cold, and poor, without providing help (vv. 15–16)? Therefore, faith without works is like empty platitudes (v. 17). Verse 18 contrasts the difference: “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith from my works.”

Verse 14 uses the language that made Martin Luther reject the book of James—it seems to say that salvation can be obtained through good works. The point is rather that our faith should be tangibly seen through our works. The question becomes, is a professing believer without works actually saved? Sometimes we wonder about the salvation of people we know simply because we never see their faith acted out through works.

Verse 19 states that even the demons believe in God, and they shudder (Mark 3:11–12; 5:1–13; Luke 8:31). *Nelson’s Commentary* states, “Even the demons have an intellectual belief in God, but it does not lead to their salvation.”¹² When we’re not walking out our faith so people can see our salvation, have we experienced true salvation?

James 2:20–26: James stated that faith without works is useless (v. 20) and pointed out how Abraham’s faith was justified through his works when he obediently offered his son on the altar (v. 21). Abraham’s faith was made perfect through his works (v. 22). *Nelson’s Commentary* states, “Faith works together with works, that is, there is a relationship between the two and the relationship is works make faith perfect, that is mature.”¹³ Verse 24 creates questions, stating man is justified by works too, not just faith. The reality is that a person lives out his faith through his works. Rahab (v. 25) acted on her faith, “but actions were necessary to affirm her inner change.”¹⁴

CLOSING

Salvation is through faith, but we have to live it out through our works.

⁹ Nelson’s Commentary, p. 1666.

¹⁰ Nelson’s Commentary, p. 1666.

¹¹ Nelson’s Commentary, p. 1666.

¹² Nelson’s Commentary, pp. 1666–1667.

¹³ Nelson’s Commentary, p. 1668.

¹⁴ Nelson’s Commentary, p. 1668