

The General Epistle of James

Chapter 2 — Compassionate Service



Even so faith, if it hath not works,
is dead, being alone.

— James 2:17

James Chapter 2 Orientation

Central burden: The faith of the Lord of glory cannot coexist with favoritism, empty words, or compassion that refuses to act. Living faith receives people impartially, fulfills the royal law of love, shows mercy, and becomes visible through obedient works.

Life Application Chapter Summary

Chapter	Movement	Christian Life
Chapter 2	Compassionate Service	What a Christian does

Chapter summary transcribed from the supplied Life Application Bible page for James 1–2.

Chapter 2 Emphases

Theme	Importance
Impartial faith	The Lord of glory forbids ranking people by wealth, clothing, status, or usefulness.
Royal law	Love of neighbor gives concrete form to the law as believers speak and act.
Mercy	Those who have received mercy must become merciful; mercy triumphs over judgment.
Living faith	A claimed faith that never serves or obeys is dead; genuine faith works through love.

Interpretive Guardrails

- Partiality is not courtesy or discernment; it is sinful judgment that assigns human worth by outward advantage.
- The poor are not saved by poverty, nor are the rich condemned merely for wealth. James condemns the values that despise need and court status.
- Paul rejects works as the basis of our acceptance before God; James rejects a fruitless claim to faith. Genuine faith produces obedient fruit.

Companion Bible Structure — James 2

The Companion Bible marks this movement by corresponding letters. The outer sections expose the difference between professed and living faith; the inner sections place the royal law beside the law of liberty, with the unity of God's law at the center.

How to read the letters: Matching letters identify corresponding movements. The letters are structural markers, not verse labels or doctrinal grades.

Letter	Verses	Movement	Description
F	2:1–7	Faith and partiality	Respect of persons contradicts faith in the Lord of glory and dishonors the poor.
G	2:8	The royal law	Love your neighbour as yourself; impartial love does well.
H	2:9–11	The law and transgression	Partiality is sin; the law is a unity, and the offender becomes a transgressor.
G	2:12–13	The law of liberty	Speak and act as those judged by liberty; mercy triumphs over judgment.
F	2:14–26	Faith and works	A workless claim is dead; Abraham and Rahab show faith acting in obedience.

Structure adapted from the supplied Companion Bible pages 1849–1851, with plain-language movement labels added for classroom clarity.

Chapter 2 Study Map

#	Passage	Study Focus
1	2:1-4	Partiality is exposed as evil judgment within the assembly.
2	2:5-7	God's regard for the poor overturns the world's measures of honor.
3	2:8-11	The royal law of love forbids selective obedience.
4	2:12-13	Merciful speech and action answer to the law of liberty.
5	2:14-17	Words without compassionate action reveal dead faith.
6	2:18-20	Faith becomes visible by works; bare assent cannot save.
7	2:21-24	Abraham's obedience fulfills and matures believing faith.
8	2:25-26	Rahab acts on faith; faith without works is lifeless.



Faith Without Partiality

1 My brethren,

- + have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- + the Lord of glory,
- + with respect of persons.

2 For if there come unto your assembly

- + a man with a gold ring,
- + in goodly apparel,
- + and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing,

- + and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place;
- + and say to the poor,
- + Stand thou there,
- + or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves,

- + and are become judges of evil thoughts?

The Poor, the Rich, and the Worthy Name

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren,

- + Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith,
- + and heirs of the kingdom
- + which he hath promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have despised the poor.

- + Do not rich men oppress you,
- + and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name

- + by the which ye are called?

The Royal Law

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture,

- + Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,
- + ye do well:

9 But if ye have respect to persons,

- + ye commit sin,
- + and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law,

- + and yet offend in one point,
- + he is guilty of all.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.

- + Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill,
- + thou art become a transgressor of the law.

The Law of Liberty and Mercy

12 So speak ye, and so do,

- + as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy,

- + that hath shewed no mercy;
- + and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

Words Without Works Cannot Profit

- 14** What doth it profit, my brethren,
+ though a man say he hath faith,
+ and have not works?
+ can faith save him?
- 15** If a brother or sister be naked,
+ and destitute of daily food,
- 16** And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace,
+ be ye warmed and filled;
+ notwithstanding ye give them not those things
+ which are needful to the body;
+ what doth it profit?
- 17** Even so faith,
+ if it hath not works,
+ is dead, being alone.

Faith Shown by Works

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works:

- + shew me thy faith without thy works,
- + and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God;

- + thou doest well:
- + the devils also believe, and tremble.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man,

- + that faith without works is dead?

Abraham: Faith Working with Obedience

- 21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works,
+ when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?
- 22** Seest thou how faith wrought with his works,
+ and by works was faith made perfect?
- 23** And the scripture was fulfilled which saith,
+ Abraham believed God,
+ and it was imputed unto him for righteousness:
+ and he was called the Friend of God.
- 24** Ye see then how that by works a man is justified,
+ and not by faith only.

Rahab and the Life of Faith

- 25** Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works,
+ when she had received the messengers,
+ and had sent them out another way?
- 26** For as the body without the spirit is dead,
+ so faith without works is dead also.

Biblical Observations

Observation 1

The Sin of Partiality

James 2

1 My brethren,

- + have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- + the Lord of glory,
- + with respect of persons.

2 For if there come unto your assembly

- + a man with a gold ring,
- + in goodly apparel,
- + and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing,

- + and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place;
- + and say to the poor,
- + Stand thou there,
- + or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves,

- + and are become judges of evil thoughts?

- *with respect of persons...* Faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, cannot coexist with assigning human worth by outward appearance.
- *a man with a gold ring...* Jewelry and bright clothing earn one man honor while the poor man is placed beneath a footstool. Favoritism turns wealth into spiritual rank.
- *judges of evil thoughts...* Partiality makes the believer an evil judge who values one life for advantage while another may be ignored.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Respect of persons — partiality; assembly — Greek synagoge, the gathering of believers.
- Goodly apparel — bright clothing; vile raiment — shabby clothing; evil thoughts — selfish measures of worth.

Personal Application — Whose appearance, position, resources, or usefulness affects the honor I give? How would Christ have me receive that person?

Biblical Observations

Observation 1 — Continued

Showing Favoritism

James 2

1 My brethren,

- + have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- + the Lord of glory,
- + with respect of persons.

2 For if there come unto your assembly

- + a man with a gold ring,
- + in goodly apparel,
- + and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3 And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing,

- + and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place;
- + and say to the poor,
- + Stand thou there,
- + or sit here under my footstool:

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves,

- + and are become judges of evil thoughts?

1	It is inconsistent with Christ's teachings.
2	It results from evil thoughts.
3	It belittles people made in God's image.
4	It is a by-product of selfish motives.
5	It goes against the biblical definition of love.
6	It shows a lack of mercy to those less fortunate.
7	It is hypocritical.
8	It is sin.

Discuss: Which reason most exposes the danger of favoritism in your own relationships or in the life of the church?

Life Application Bible sidebar — transcribed from the supplied James 2:1–5 photograph.

Biblical Observations

Observation 2

God's Regard for the Poor and the Worthy Name

James 2

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren,

- + Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith,
- + and heirs of the kingdom
- + which he hath promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have despised the poor.

- + Do not rich men oppress you,
- + and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name

- + by the which ye are called?

- *God chosen the poor...* God's choice overturns worldly measurement. Poverty does not save, yet those with little earthly security may be especially aware of their need and rich in faith.
- *ye have despised the poor...* The believers dishonored people God honored while admiring a class that often oppressed them. James condemns neither wealth nor courtesy, but status without regard for conduct.
- *that worthy name...* The worthy name is Christ's. Their treatment of one another either honors that confession or joins the world in dishonoring it.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Chosen and rich in faith — God's grace, not human status, establishes the believer's standing and inheritance.
- Oppress — exercise power against; judgment seats — courts; worthy name — Christ's honorable name.

Personal Application — Do I associate wealth with God's favor or poverty with failure? How can I honor Christ in those with little influence?

Biblical Observations

Observation 2 — Continued

7 Facts Exposing Partiality

James 2

4 Are ye not then partial in yourselves,
+ and are become judges of evil thoughts?

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren,
+ Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith,
+ and heirs of the kingdom
+ which he hath promised to them that love him?

6 But ye have despised the poor.
+ Do not rich men oppress you,
+ and draw you before the judgment seats?

7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name
+ by the which ye are called?

1	The judge was partial (v 4)
2	The judge had evil thoughts (v 4)
3	God hath chosen the poor who are rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom in preference to the rich of this world who do not have faith (v 5)
4	The rich despised the poor (v 6)
5	Wicked rich men oppress the poor (v 6)
6	They force the poor to trials before judges that are partial to themselves
7	They blaspheme God's name (v 7)

Discuss: Which fact most clearly shows how favoritism reverses God's values, and where might that reversal be needed today?

Dake note — transcribed verbatim from the supplied James 2 reference photograph.

Biblical Observations

Observation 3

The Royal Law and the Unity of Obedience

James 2

8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture,

- + Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,
- + ye do well:

9 But if ye have respect to persons,

- + ye commit sin,
- + and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law,

- + and yet offend in one point,
- + he is guilty of all.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.

- + Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill,
- + thou art become a transgressor of the law.

- *fulfil the royal law...* Love of neighbor is royal because it belongs to the King. It seeks the good of rich and poor without using status as the measure of worth.
- *if ye have respect to persons...* James refuses to treat favoritism as harmless. The law exposes it as sin and the partial person as a transgressor.
- *guilty of all...* God's law is one expression of His will. Obedience in some areas cannot excuse setting aside the command that confronts us.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Royal law — the sovereign law of the King: love your neighbour as yourself (Leviticus 19:18).
- Convinced — convicted by the law; guilty of all — accountable as a lawbreaker to the one Lawgiver.

Personal Application — Which command do I treat as optional because I obey elsewhere? How does love of neighbor restore wholeness?

Biblical Observations

Observation 4

The Law of Liberty and the Triumph of Mercy

James 2

12 So speak ye, and so do,

+ as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For he shall have judgment without mercy,

+ that hath shewed no mercy;

+ and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

- *So speak ye, and so do...* James joins speech and action. Coming judgment gives urgency: both must be shaped by obedient freedom rather than partiality.
- *judged by the law of liberty...* Liberty is not permission to disregard God's will. The implanted Word frees believers from sin's rule and enables joyful obedience to the King's law of love.
- *mercy rejoiceth against judgment...* Mercilessness reveals that mercy has not governed the heart. Mercy triumphs over judgment where grace forms a merciful people.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Law of liberty — God's will received and obeyed through grace, not self-salvation.
- Judgment without mercy — the sober end of persisting without mercy.
- Rejoiceth against — triumphs over or boasts over.

Personal Application — Where do my words or decisions withhold mercy?
What merciful action fits the liberty I have received?

3 Laws

1	The law of mercy (Mt. 5:7)
2	Law of forgiveness (Mt. 6:14-15)
3	Law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7-8)

Discuss: Which of these three laws most speaks to your present relationships, and what response does it call for?

Biblical Observations

Observation 5

Words Without Compassion Cannot Profit

James 2

14 What doth it profit, my brethren,
+ though a man say he hath faith,
+ and have not works?
+ can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister be naked,
+ and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace,
+ be ye warmed and filled;
+ notwithstanding ye give them not those things
+ which are needful to the body;
+ what doth it profit?

17 Even so faith,
+ if it hath not works,
+ is dead, being alone.

- *though a man say he hath faith...* James tests a claim to faith that produces no works. The issue is not whether true faith saves, but whether empty profession is true faith at all.
- *be ye warmed and filled...* Religious words become cruel when they promise warmth and fullness but refuse needed help. Compassion cannot remain a sentiment.
- *faith... is dead, being alone...* Faith without works is dead and alone. Works do not purchase salvation; they are the living movement of a heart that trusts God and responds in love.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- What doth it profit? — What saving value does the empty claim possess?
- Naked and destitute — without daily necessities; being alone — without the fruit of living faith.

Personal Application — Where have kind words replaced help I could give?
What need can I meet as compassionate service?

Biblical Observations

Observation 6

Faith Becomes Visible by Works

James 2

18 Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works:

- + shew me thy faith without thy works,
- + and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

19 Thou believest that there is one God;

- + thou doest well:
- + the devils also believe, and tremble.

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man,

- + that faith without works is dead?

- *shew me thy faith...* Faith is inward and cannot be displayed as an isolated object. James's challenge is practical: show it. Works make the character of faith visible by revealing trust, allegiance, and obedience.
- *the devils also believe...* Demons possess correct information about the one God and respond with terror, yet they do not love or obey Him. Bare assent to true statements is therefore not the saving trust James is describing.
- *faith without works is dead...* The vain person wants faith without the life that belongs to it. James's repeated verdict is that faith separated from works is dead—like a claim to life without breath, motion, or fruit.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Shew — demonstrate openly; works give visible expression to faith.
- One God — an orthodox confession (Deuteronomy 6:4) that even demons can acknowledge without submission.
- Vain man — empty or fruitless person; the source tradition also notes a reading meaning idle or barren.

Personal Application — If someone could observe only my choices, generosity, forgiveness, and obedience, what would those works show about the faith I profess?

Biblical Observations

Observation 7

Abraham: Faith Working with Obedience

James 2

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works,
+ when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works,
+ and by works was faith made perfect?

23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith,
+ Abraham believed God,
+ and it was imputed unto him for righteousness:
+ and he was called the Friend of God.

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified,
+ and not by faith only.

- *Abraham our father...* James looks to Abraham's offering of Isaac as the visible demonstration of faith. The act did not begin Abraham's relationship with God; it showed the reality of the trust already counted as righteousness.
- *faith wrought with his works...* Faith worked together with his works, and through obedient action faith reached maturity. Works did not replace faith; they brought its claim to its intended expression.
- *the scripture was fulfilled...* Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled in the sense that Abraham's later obedience confirmed the truth of his earlier belief. He was called the Friend of God because living trust shaped his life.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Justified — shown or declared righteous in the demonstrated outcome of obedient faith.
- Wrought with — worked together; faith and action were not rivals.
- Made perfect — brought to maturity or completion.
- Imputed — counted or reckoned; Abraham believed God before the Genesis 22 test.

Personal Application — What truth do I claim to believe that God is presently asking me to express through costly obedience?

Biblical Observations

Observation 8

Rahab and the Life of Faith

James 2

25 Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works,

- + when she had received the messengers,
- + and had sent them out another way?

26 For as the body without the spirit is dead,

- + so faith without works is dead also.

- *Rahab... received the messengers...* Rahab risked herself to receive and protect the messengers. Her action showed that she trusted Israel's God above Jericho's security.
- *sent them out another way...* She sent them out another way, completing her protection. Faith moved into costly welcome, courage, and deliverance.
- *the body without the spirit is dead...* A body separated from its animating spirit is dead; faith separated from obedient works is likewise lifeless. Living faith moves.

Word Notes and Cross-References — Companion Bible

- Rahab — a Gentile woman whose faith acted under danger (Joshua 2; Hebrews 11:31).
- Received — welcomed and protected; sent out — provided escape.
- Body without the spirit — profession without living action.

Personal Application — Where might faith require courageous welcome, protection, or costly action?

2 Examples of Justification by Faith and Works, Not Works Only

1	Abraham (v 21-24; Gen. 22)
2	Rahab (v 25; Josh. 2 and 6)

Discuss: Which example most challenges you today—Abraham's costly obedience or Rahab's courageous welcome—and why?

How the Study Notes Were Prepared

The study notes are not copied wholesale from one Bible. The chart below identifies what came directly from the supplied sources and what was written as classroom synthesis.

Material	How It Was Used
Companion Bible	King James Version text, the F–G–H–G–F chapter structure, word meanings, translation details, and cross-references. On the observation pages, each base term comes from the Companion Bible and the wording after the dash gives a concise plain-language explanation for classroom use. The movement labels are also plain-language summaries of the Companion structure.
Dake Bible	The three numbered Dake lists are transcribed verbatim from the supplied photographs. Selected background details also inform the observations where applicable.
Life Application Bible	The chapter summary and the eight-point Showing Favoritism list are transcribed from the supplied pages. Its practical emphasis also informs several application questions.
Biblical Observations	The explanatory observation paragraphs are original study synthesis based on James 2, the supplied notes, and the cited Scripture cross-references. They are not verbatim commentary from the Companion Bible or another single source.

Source Pages

- The Companion Bible, James pages 1848–1854.
- Dake Annotated Reference Bible, James pages 455–458.
- Life Application Bible, James pages 2182–2187.

Chapter 2 Review



Summary

James chapter 2 teaches compassionate service—what a Christian does. Faith in the Lord of glory refuses partiality, because God does not measure human worth by outward advantage. The royal law commands love of neighbor, merciful speech, and action under the law of liberty.

The second half exposes a workless claim to faith. Words that do not feed or clothe cannot profit. Abraham and Rahab show faith acting through costly obedience. Works do not earn salvation; they demonstrate living faith. As the body without the spirit is dead, faith without works is dead also.

Key Movements in the Text

- 2:1–4 — Partiality contradicts faith in the Lord of glory.
- 2:5–7 — God honors the poor in faith; worldly status proves unreliable.
- 2:8–11 — The royal law commands whole-hearted love of neighbor.
- 2:12–13 — The law of liberty forms merciful speech and action.
- 2:14–17 — Words without compassionate help reveal dead faith.
- 2:18–20 — Works make faith visible; bare assent cannot save.
- 2:21–24 — Abraham’s obedience brings faith to mature expression.
- 2:25–26 — Rahab acts courageously; living faith moves.

Chapter 2 Review



Questions for Reflection

- Whom am I tempted to honor or ignore because of appearance, wealth, position, or usefulness?
- How can our gathering make equal room for people whom the world overlooks?
- Where have kind words replaced practical help I was able to give?
- Does my speech show mercy toward people who cannot benefit me?
- What does my present pattern of works reveal about the faith I profess?
- What costly obedience would bring a belief I hold to mature expression?
- Where might courageous welcome or protection be the work faith requires?

One Memory Verse

James 2:17

Even so faith, if it hath not works,
is dead, being alone.



Closing Prayer

Father, You have shown us mercy in Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Forgive us for measuring people by appearance, wealth, position, or usefulness. Purify our judgments and teach us to receive every person with the honor due to one made in Your image.

Write the royal law of love upon our conduct. Make our speech and actions merciful, and free us to obey Your Word with joy. When a brother or sister is in need, do not let us hide behind kind words while withholding the help we are able to give.

Deliver us from a faith that exists only in speech. As Abraham obeyed and Rahab acted with courage, make our trust visible through generous service, costly obedience, and steadfast love. Bring our faith to maturity, so that what we confess is evident in how we live.

May mercy triumph over judgment in our relationships, and may our works bear faithful witness to the grace we have received. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.