

James 2B

- After a two week break, it can be difficult to find our way back into the writer's line of thought
 - But with a few minutes of review, I'm confident we can pick back up again
 - In the first half of James' second chapter, he was discussing the final test of our faith
 - The test was how we respond to Christians according to their social distinctions
 - When confronted by a brother or sister with a high social status, will we follow our flesh and show favoritism hoping to gain their favor?
 - Or will we remain indifferent to social status treating all Christians the same, and thus gain favor with the Lord?
 - James said if we show favoritism within the Body of Christ we are making judgments based on evil motives
 - More importantly, when we show favoritism, we are not operating according to the Royal Law, the Law of Christ which rules over the New Testament believer
 - We will have broken the Law of Christ, James says
 - We will not have treated our neighbor as we hoped to be treated
- Now in the remaining part of his second chapter and into the third chapter, James begins to explore the consequences of failing these tests
 - And last time, James told us that failing these tests was a violation of God's law
 - But more specifically, the Law we violate is the Law of Christ
 - Or the Royal Law as James calls it
 - In v.12, he also calls it the Law of Liberty

- And having mentioned this Law and our risk of transgressing it, James now moves into a sidebar discussion concerning our responsibilities to that law

[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.

[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.

- To repeat, James teaches that showing partiality makes us transgressors of law
 - Earlier in v.8 he had specified that the law in view here is not the Law of Moses
 - It was a different law, the royal law
 - And that law was the two-part commandment that Jesus Himself said summed up the entirety of God’s Law
 - Love your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength
 - Love your neighbor as yourself
 - Partiality violated the second part of that commandment
 - Then James adds that whoever keeps the whole law but fails in keeping just one point has become guilty of all
 - The phrase “whoever keeps the Law” here describes the thinking of an individual, not their actual behavior
 - Someone who believes he is keeping the whole Law
 - But then that person makes a single mistake
 - James offers an example from the Ten Commandments
 - Someone who keeps one of them, but then fails to keep another
 - That person is just as assuredly a transgressor of the Law as someone who had broken both of them

- James is not teaching that all offenses are equally bad or will result in an equal consequence
 - God's Law has always had varying degrees of punishment for differing offenses
 - Said another way, while it is worse to violate two laws than to violate just one law, it is not better that we violate one law instead of two
- Because even just one violation offends the Law Giver
- Edmond Hiebert said:

Our obedience to God's will cannot be on a selective basis; we cannot choose that part that is to our liking and disregard the rest. God's will is not fragmentary; the entire law is the expression of His will for His people; it constitutes a grand unity. To break out one corner of a window pane is to become guilty of breaking the whole pane.

- So when we show partiality, James says we not only fail to love our neighbor as we love ourself
 - But we also fail to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength
- In that sense, our faith and love for God is closely interconnected with our behavior (or our works)
 - When we fail in our behaviors, we are working against or in opposition to our confession of faith
 - We weaken our confession and limit its usefulness to us and God
- Then James gives us the consequence of failing to live out our faith in keeping with God's expectations

[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.

- We will be judged by the Law of Liberty
 - The Law of Liberty is the standard of conduct for every believer
 - This Law replaces the Law of Moses, which condemned us prior to faith

- Paul describes the transition in several places in the New Testament, but to summarize the point we can look at two short passages

[Rom. 7:1](#) Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the **law**), that the **law** has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives?

[Rom. 7:2](#) For the married woman is bound by **law** to her husband while he is living; but if her husband dies, she is released from the **law** concerning the husband.

[Rom. 7:3](#) So then, if while her husband is living she is joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from the **law**, so that she is not an adulteress though she is joined to another man.

[Rom. 7:4](#) Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the **Law** through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

[Rom. 7:5](#) For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the **Law**, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.

[Rom. 7:6](#) But now we have been released from the **Law**, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter

- Before faith, we were “wedded” to the Law of Moses, which only served to condemn us
 - And like marriage, we weren’t eligible to wed Christ until there was a death in our first marriage to the Law
 - But when we came to faith, our spouse (the Law) didn’t die...we did
 - We were seen as dying, in the sense that we died in Christ on the cross
 - Then we were born again into a new marriage with a new groom...Christ
 - And that new relationship brought a new standard of behavior
 - A standard Paul calls the ministry of the Spirit, rather than a ministry of the letter of the Law of Moses
 - We now follow the Spirit of Christ rather than the letter of law
- Paul says it another way in 2 Corinthians:

[2Cor. 3:5](#) Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,
[2Cor. 3:6](#) who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

[2Cor. 3:15](#) But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart;
[2Cor. 3:16](#) but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
[2Cor. 3:17](#) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

- Paul was a servant of a new covenant that didn't originate in the letter of the old Law
 - But it comes from the Spirit to give eternal life
 - And today the Law is still read in the synagogue by Jews, but it has no effect in converting them to Christ because the truth is hidden from them
 - But when they turn to Christ, the veil is removed, and they receive His Spirit
 - And having received the Spirit, they now have liberty
- Liberty doesn't mean freedom to sin
 - Liberty means freedom to follow God's Spirit in obedience to His will knowing that our righteousness has already been obtained
 - And as such, it becomes a test of our love for our Lord
 - The situation could be compared to a son working for his father's business, trying to earn enough money for retirement
 - The son worked hard to do everything his job required because he was striving to reach his retirement goal
 - But then unexpectedly, the son receives a gift of money from the father that's large enough to take care of him for the rest of his life

Like the story of the old man when asked by a younger man how he made his money. In response, the gentleman said...

"Well, son, it was 1932. The depth of the Great Depression. I was down to my last nickel. I invested that nickel in an apple. I spent the entire day polishing the apple and, at the end of the day, I sold the apple for ten cents.

The next morning, I invested those ten cents in two apples. I spent the entire day polishing them and sold them at 5:00pm for 20 cents. I continued this system for a month, by the end of which I'd accumulated a fortune of \$1.37.

Then my father-in-law died and left us two million dollars."

- Before the gift arrived, the son's relationship to his father had been defined by the rules of the job
 - Because that was what was required to earn what the son needed
 - He was restricted to working according to the rules of his job
 - He wasn't free to do otherwise, since he was in jeopardy without his retirement secured
 - And his hard work only served to remind him of how far he was from reaching his goal
 - It was just a yoke and burden
- But now that the gift has arrived, the son has been freed from the burdens and restrictions of his job
 - He can begin a new phase of his relationship with the father now that his retirement goal had already been reached
 - The son can now serve his father in new ways that were never possible before while he was trying to earn his security
- Previously, his father's test of obedience would have been how well the son performed his job according to the rules of that job
 - But now that he no longer needed to work, the test becomes whether the son will obey and follow his father's desires apart from the rules of the job
 - And the test becomes a test of love
 - A measure of his love for his father
- Our Father in Heaven will make a similar assessment of us at our moment of judgment
 - We have already been given our place in the kingdom, and our eternal salvation is assured based on a gift of faith

- That gift has freed us from following the letter of the Law of Moses...of earning salvation
 - Through Christ's perfect life, we are already credited with having lived the Law perfectly
 - So we no longer need to attempt to live it as a means of pleasing God
 - But then the question becomes how we will serve the Lord now that we have been freed from the need to work for salvation?
 - James teaches that we are expected to obey according to the Spirit
 - Which means following God's direction in our life by listening to the Spirit's call and direction on our life
 - And the Spirit's intent will always be to draw us toward living out the royal law or the law of liberty
 - But when we fail to live according to that law, we should know we are grieving the Spirit
 - We are no longer walking in the Spirit, we are walking in our flesh
 - And that decision will bring consequences, just as violating the Law of Moses brings consequences
- James says in v.13 that judgment awaits the one who fails to show mercy
 - James mentions mercy here because he's speaking about the consequences of showing favoritism
 - When we show favoritism to one believer over another, we are the one who has failed to show mercy
 - Because we have made a judgment against the poor brother and in favor of a rich brother
 - We fail to show mercy to that poor brother
 - And therefore we shouldn't expect the Lord to show us mercy either
 - The Lord will be merciless to us as well, which means He will show favor to other believers over us

- Just as we were showing favor to one believer over another
- And of course, this same distinction will be made when we fail any test of faith, be it mercy or love or obedience in any form
 - There are consequences in how the Lord will judge us
 - Remembering that judgment is for the purpose of reward, not a judgment concerning salvation
 - But that judgment is a strict one, and our behavior in following the Spirit is not one to be taken lightly

[Heb. 10:26](#) For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

[Heb. 10:27](#) but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.

[Heb. 10:28](#) Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

[Heb. 10:29](#) How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

[Heb. 10:30](#) For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."

[Heb. 10:31](#) It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

- The judgment fire the writer describes here aren't the fires of hell but the judgment fire that tests the quality of our work
 - And if there were severe punishments allotted to those who violated the Old Covenant, how great will the consequences be for those who disobey the Law of a new better covenant
 - The writer says it will be a terrifying thing
 - Paul also uses fire to describe that judgment moment for believers:

[1Cor. 3:11](#) For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

[1Cor. 3:12](#) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

[1Cor. 3:13](#) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

[1Cor. 3:14](#) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward.

[1Cor. 3:15](#) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

- Now keeping in mind that this is the judgment moment that James has in view, he begins to discuss the relationship with faith and works for a believer

[James 2:14](#) What use is it, my brethren, if someone 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 what use is it to have faith but no works
 - The word for use is *ophelos*, which means profit or advantage
 - So James is asking how can faith without works profit a believer?
 - Said another way, how do we expect to profit from a faith that is absent works?
 - Remember, there is no credit awarded at the judgment for simply having faith
 - Paul says that:

[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, so that no one may boast.

- So we can't expect to receive our Lord's congratulations and thanks merely for believing
 - That was a work He did in the first place
 - And it will be nothing to boast about
 - So our faith must yield works if we expect to profit or receive eternal praise and reward
- So James then asks if a believer has faith but no works, can that faith save him?
 - This question has led countless Christians to two conclusions, both of which miss James' point

- First, some have thought that James is teaching that works are a necessary component for salvation
 - That we must have faith *and* works to obtain the righteousness necessary for salvation
 - But as Paul explained concerning himself

[Phil. 3:8](#) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,
[Phil. 3:9](#) and may be found in Him, **not having a righteousness of my own** derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, **the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,**

- The second misinterpretation is that James is describing a non-Christian or a person who has made a false confession
 - That when someone confesses Christ, they will always have works
 - And if they lack works, it must mean they lack true faith
 - Therefore, can that “faith” save him?
- But this second view is equally wrong, based on the context of James
 - James hasn’t been discussing true faith vs. false faith
 - James has been discussing the failure of believers to live according to the royal law
 - And in the immediately preceding verses, James introduced the subject of the judgment fire that will test each believer’s work
 - So in that context James is asking if a faith that has no works will save a believer
 - He’s not discussing unbelievers facing the judgment fires of hell...that’s the wrong context
- James is talking about a believer facing the judgment fire of the Bema Seat, the Judgment Seat of Christ (e.g., 1 Corinthians 3)
- So when James asks can that faith “save him,” he’s asking if a faith lived without works will save the believer when he stands at the fiery Judgment Seat of Christ

- This is the judgment fire that tests our work and reveals our reward, as Paul described
 - And of course a believer who enters that moment without works should not expect to be “saved” from that judgment
- On the contrary, for that Christian the judgment seat of Christ will be a terrifying experience as the writer of Hebrews says
 - Such a believer has lived a life of stubborn disobedience to the Spirit’s call
 - He has transgressed the Royal Law, the Law of Liberty
 - And he will not be saved from the consequences of those choices
 - He will face a merciless judgment, as James says
- Then James offers a particularly convicting example to consider
 - He asks if a Christian expresses concern for a fellow believer who is poor and in need, but then does nothing material to help address the believer’s needs
 - Of what use is that response?
 - The word “use” is again the Greek word for profit or advantage
 - So James asks how can that unhelpful response profit anyone?
 - It certainly doesn’t profit the needy believer, who is still without the food and clothing they need
 - And it doesn’t profit the believer himself, who failed to perform a work of mercy and will not receive Christ’s approval at the judgment moment
 - Remember, meeting fellow believers’ needs is an act of mercy in itself
 - So our failure to act is a failure to show mercy in these circumstances
 - And it will result in the Lord refraining from showing us mercy at the judgment
 - And our failures will not profit us
- Finally, James makes his most provocative statement

- Faith without works is dead, being by itself
 - By “dead,” James means it is lifeless, without benefit to men or God or even to the believer himself
 - It is dead in the same way that a campfire can appear dead
 - It’s not actually gone, since there may still be hot embers deep in the ashes
 - But with the flame having gone out, it appears lifeless and it offers little value to anyone unless and until the coals are stoked aflame again
- We have plenty to think about in these verses
 - We should examine ourselves in light of these scriptures
 - First, are we thinking about our actions and priorities with an eye toward our judgment moment?
 - Do we consider how we are impacting that moment when we make decisions about where to spend our time or money or talents?
 - Do we remember the royal law as we consider our actions at work and in the home or in the Body of Christ?
 - Are we ready to meet the Lord right now? Or do we have some work to do to show the Lord that our faith is not a dead faith, one that profits no one?
 - Let’s recommit to living our faith outwardly, intending to show the love of Christ and thereby have much to profit from