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James 2

“Ten Marks of Maturity” Part 2

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The year was 1517 when a Roman Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther took issue with his own church’s teaching on justification. At issue was whether or not a person is justified in God’s eyes through faith alone or through faith and good works. The Roman Catholic Church emphasized that it was faith *and* good works. (Emphasis added)

Luther liked Scriptures like [Romans 5:1-2](#)¹ and [Galatians 3:11](#),² and many other passages like these led him to reject the doctrine of justification by works. He took issue with other doctrines as well, and compiled them into a long list, and having written them out, on October 31, 1517 he nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Wittenberg Church in Wittenberg, Germany. The result of his protesting the Roman Catholic doctrine was that he was summarily excommunicated; and the Protestant Church was born.

Because one of Luther’s main objections was over the teaching that you had to have faith and perform good works in order to be saved, it has been widely known that he didn’t care much for the epistle of James. In fact, Luther called it the “epistle of straw.”³ He thought that James was placing too much emphasis on doing good works as a condition of salvation, however, that’s not what James was saying. James wasn’t saying that you had to do good works in order to be saved; he was saying that mature Christians would do good works because they are saved. The Bible teaches us that works are not necessary to be saved; they are the evidence that you are saved.

¹ “[Since] we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand...”

² “... No one is justified before God by the law, because, ‘The righteous [just] will live by faith.’ ”

³ Martin Luther, *Preface to the New Testament*, 1522.

In this study, we'll see that the point James makes is that mature Christians will put faith into action and avoid favoritism.

Put Faith Into Action

1. **James 2:15-17** says, *"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 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? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*
 - a. In other words, if you have it within your means to help, to give, to serve, to love, to be an example of Jesus, then you shouldn't just give lip service; you need to put your faith into action.
2. Someone might say, "But I thought my faith was only about believing in God, and not what I do?"
 - a. James' anticipates this question, and in **James 2:19** he writes that demons believe in God, and even though they have right doctrine, they don't have a relationship with God.
 - b. "Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather."⁴ D. L. Moody
 - c. **James 4:17** says, *"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."*
3. When you do anything as unto the Lord, you're putting your faith into action.
4. A word of caution needs to be given.
 - a. You do not have to meet the needs of every person; only the needs that the Holy Spirit directs you to.
 - b. Christians need to exercise discernment, because some people can take advantage of well-intentioned Believers.

Avoid Favoritism

5. **James 2:1** - *"My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism."*
 - a. The KJV uses the phrase *"respect [to] persons."*

6. Christians may not like to admit it, but even in the church people tend to be partial toward certain people.
 - a. People are easily impressed with others concerning the amount of money they make, the car they drive, the clothes they wear, their job, the number of letters after their name, their looks, and the list goes on and on.
 - b. There have even been studies that demonstrate that attractive students get more attention and higher evaluations, good looking patients get more personalized care from their doctors, handsome criminals receive lighter sentences than less attractive convicts, and good looking people make 11% - 15% more money than unattractive people.⁵

7. There are three reasons why favoritism is sin.
 - a. It is inconsistent with God's nature.
 - i. God doesn't show favoritism, because it's contrary to his nature, so to show favoritism stands in opposition to the character and nature of the Lord.
 - ii. [Romans 2:11](#) - *"For God does not show favoritism."*
 - iii. [Acts 10:34-35](#) - *"Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.'"*
 - iv. If God accepts everyone, but we don't because we elevate one person over another, we sin.
 - b. It is inconsiderate of others.
 - i. [James 2:3-4](#) - *"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,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"*
 - ii. Favoritism not only shows the way we pander to certain people, it exposes hidden discrimination against others.
 - iii. A recent Cornell University study that was published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that siblings who sensed that a parent consistently favored or rejected one child over others are more likely to show depressive symptoms as middle-aged adults.⁶
 - c. It violates the law of Love.
 - i. [James 2:8-9](#) - *"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers."*

⁵ http://articles.cnn.com/2005-07-08/us/looks_1_plain-people-daniel-hamermesh-studies?_s=PM:US

⁶ <http://www.newswise.com/articles/moms-favoritism-tied-to-depressive-symptoms-in-adult-children>

- ii. God is not impressed with someone's net worth, their appearance, their education or their wardrobe; none of these things matter to God.
- iii. God evaluates a person's worth solely on the basis of the value that he has attached to life, which God sees as being of inestimable value!
- iv. We are to see each other as God does; irrespective of all the social stigmas or relative value that we place on people.
- v. Jesus told two parables that tell about someone finding treasure and pearls and choosing to sell everything to buy them. These parables speak of the great love that God has for all people, and since we know God sent Jesus into the world to pay the penalty for sin, it isn't difficult for us to understand that we are the treasure and the pearls and that he gave his life for us.
 - 1. [Matthew 13:44-46](#) - “ ‘The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.’ ”

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [James 2:1-4, 8-9, and 14-26](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Read and discuss [Ephesians 2:8-9](#), [Romans 5:1-2](#) and [Galatians 3:11](#).
4. Read and discuss this quote by D.L. Moody: “Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather.”
5. Has it been your experience that you have “given away the farm” when you’ve been made aware of certain needs?
 - a. Do you feel compelled to help everyone who has a need?
 - b. How has discernment played a part in your decision-making?
 - c. Have you been “burned” by someone who was less than honest in representing their need(s)?

6. Read and discuss [John 5:1-15](#).
 - a. Why is it that Jesus walked past a great number of sick people to heal just one man?
7. Spend time talking about specific examples of times when you've sensed the leading of the Holy Spirit to meet a need.
8. Spend time talking about different ways to put your faith into "shoe leather."
 - a. You may want to use several examples to get the conversation started: Change diapers in the nursery - Teach a Sunday school class - Open a door as a greeter - Direct cars in the parking lot - Keep your word even when it hurts - Share your faith with others - Obey God's Word - Purchase groceries for your elderly neighbor - Buy a winter coat for someone in need - Put some cash in an envelope for someone out of work.
9. Are you intentional about your ministry to others for the Lord?
10. Do you have any experiences like the one Pastor Gary's family had with "book boy"?⁷
11. Allow the people in your group to share examples of ways they've seen people show favoritism.
 - a. Read and discuss [Acts 10:34-35](#).
12. Review the study Pastor Gary mentioned regarding people favoring attractive people. (See #6b above)
13. Read and discuss [Matthew 13:44-46](#).
 - a. What's been your understanding of these parables prior to hearing this teaching?
 - b. Has it been your understanding that the parable means that when you find/stumble upon Jesus you're supposed to go and sell everything you have to "go get Jesus"?
 - c. Spend time talking about the fact that Jesus is the one who found each sinner and he gave everything to purchase each person. ([1 Corinthians 6:20b](#))
14. Close your time with prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person to do a self-examination to determine how they're doing with the command to put

⁷ Use this link to access the message and move forward to 18:50 to watch Pastor Gary tell this his version of the story. <http://www.cornerstonechapel.net/player/?i=549>

their faith into action; seek the Lord's help to determine when they are being called to minister to others by meeting their need(s); praise the Lord for the great extent of his love for each and every person without favoritism; praise the Lord for giving life as a ransom for sinners.