



=



WEEK TWO – DOING, NOT JUST HEARING

Reading: James 1:19-2:25

This section of James is all about **Practical Christianity** inasmuch as it focuses on being **DOERS** not just **HEARERS**, which is the only true way of living the gospel. The well-known Christian writer, Charles Swindoll describes the book of James as looking a bit like the Old Testament book of Proverbs, dressed up in New Testament clothes. Its consistent focus is on practical action in our life of faith. He says that *“For James, a faith that does not produce real life change is a faith that is worthless.”* (James 2:17)

“My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Your anger can never make things right in God’s sight.” James 1:19-20

What an important truth! If only we could take it to heart and follow its instructions.

- How has our Christian faith changed us and the way we live?
- Why does James say this real-life change is essential?
- How do we train ourselves to follow this instruction?

Read verses 21-25

- What do you think James is talking about in verse 21?
- This verse is an imperative, a command, emphasised in verse 22. It is a message to obey, not just to listen to.
- Read Psalm 19:7-10

“The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them, your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

- If this what verse 25 is talking about, and I believe it is, what does it mean for us and the way we live?

We will come back to verse 26 in a later study.

Chapter 2:1-12 raises a big issue, that of personal favouritism or partiality. As a former teacher, I was from time to time, quite unjustly I believe, accused of favouritism. This issue has been in the news lately in relation to teachers having to give grades in place of exam results, accusing them of favouring the better behaved, or those whose appearance is more appealing. Do we favour those who visually look, and are educationally, better than others?

James claims that this could be a problem in the church and, straight to the point, says *"But if you pay special attention to the rich, you are committing a sin, for you are guilty of breaking that law."* He describes how people are made to sit in different places according to how they look, whether they are rich or poor, making no bones about the cause.

- Do we show partiality? If so, how is that demonstrated?
- Would we voluntarily go and sit next to one of the homeless whose hygiene is not up to our standards?
- Do we assess people on how they look and act when it is not 'acceptable' according to us? Do we stop to consider whether there maybe good reasons for the situation?
- Verse 13 is brutally honest. *"For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God's mercy toward you will win out over his judgement against you."*
- "Mercy" can be defined as "compassion or forbearance shown especially to an offender or to one subject to one's power"; and also "a blessing that is an act of divine favour or compassion." "To be at someone's mercy" indicates a person being "without defence against someone."
- We have been shown mercy by God, but do we extend mercy to others?

Read: [Matthew 18:21-35](#) as an illustration of how NOT to behave.

The remaining verses of the chapter deal with an issue that is often contentious, faiths versus works. In Ephesians 2:8-9, Paul says that we are saved by grace (*Grace is a spiritual gift that involves love and mercy given to others even when we feel that they don't deserve it.*), through faith which is a gift from God, not of works, so no one can boast.

In this chapter, questions are asked about how we behave towards those in need of say, food or clothing. Do we tell them to go in peace, be warmed and filled, and not give them the means to do this? So, whilst we are saved by faith, what about our deeds? Pulling no punches, after saying that some say they have faith and others that they

have good deeds, verse 18 goes on to say: *“I can’t see your faith if you don’t have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds.”* Verse 20, *“Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless?”*

Two illustrations are used to illustrate this. Abraham, whom God declared to be righteous, trusted God to the extent that he was willing to sacrifice his son on the altar: *His faith was made complete by what he did – by his actions.* Likewise, Rahab the harlot, was justified by works when she hid the spies to save their lives and hers was the only family saved after the destruction of Jericho.

The conclusion therefore is *“Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also faith is dead without good deeds.”*

- Do we understand the balance that James is talking about? We sometimes say people are too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use, whilst others believe that good works alone are sufficient.

Psalm 39:1 *“I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue ...”*

Prayer:

**Father God, help me to understand, and follow, the teachings in your word.
May I always have a generosity of spirit and demonstrate your love and mercy
through the way I live.**

