

Meditation #1
James 2:5
Rev. Cory Griess

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?

Imagine the prime minister or the president comes into church one Sunday—or, if you like, the CEO of Facebook. Not far behind him comes in an older man who has very out-of-date clothing and smells funny. What do you think will happen? Will the one be showered with attention while the other is largely ignored? Will the one be ushered up to the front so everyone can see him while the other is asked to find a seat in the back by himself? If that does happen in our church, we are guilty of the sin of respect of persons on the basis of earthly, external things. This was a sin James saw in the church in his day and that he confronts in the first section of James 2. This sin can show up in many ways in our lives too. A church may elect the wealthy, prominent man to office even though he is not as spiritually qualified as the less prominent man who has less money. The office bearers can be too scared to discipline a certain member because he donated a large sum to the building fund. Some members can leave a theologically sound church for another less sound church because that church has a massive building and the preacher wears a youthful haircut. A group of teenagers at church can neglect the teenager who isn't like them. If we are not careful, we very easily join the world in respecting the outward.

By inspiration, James asks a rhetorical question to shake us from the allurements of the external. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world?" It's true. It is not that he *never* chooses the wealthy. 1 Corinthians 1:26 says that not *many* wise men after the flesh... mighty... (or) noble, are called. *Some* are, but not *many*. Most of God's chosen people are not the movers and shakers in this life.

Though the chosen are mostly inglorious in the eyes of the world, they are "rich(!)...in faith, and heirs of the kingdom." Not rich outwardly, but rich inwardly! One who has been given the gift of faith is wealthy indeed! A glorious and unending kingdom is bequeathed to him! This is what we must see in God's people. This reality must catch our eye. Faith! The spiritual kingdom of God in the heart! This is true wealth and true glory! Our eye must be as God's eye; we must respect what he respects.

By giving us the supreme example of our Lord Jesus Christ, God teaches us what we must take notice of. This Christ was not outwardly glorious. He is the one who, though poor in this world ("the Son of man hath not where to lay his head," Luke 9:58), was the "Lord of glory" (James 2:1). He was the beloved Son of God, full of faith and truth! King of a glorious and eternal kingdom! His own glory God plants in the hearts of his people, all of them, no matter how they look or dress.

And we must be thankful that God has planted such glory in us as one among that number. Who are you? Who am I? We are weak and beggarly, the offscouring and refuse of the world (Lam. 3:45), and sinners the worst beside. Yet, in Jesus Christ, we are rich in faith, heirs of his kingdom. What grace!

Memory Verse: *1 Corinthians 1:26-27 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*

Meditation #2
James 2:14
Rev. Cory Griess

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

There are many people who say that James contradicts Paul here. Paul says in Romans 3:28, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” James says, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?” But James and Paul do not contradict at all. James would say, “Amen!” to Romans 3:28, and Paul would say, “Amen!” to James 2:14 (and the rest of James 2).

Say a young person comes to the consistory to make confession of faith. The minister asks the young person, “Do you strive to lead a holy life?” The young person responds, “I do; I strive for that. I am not perfect, but I strive for it.” The minister then asks the same young person, “If you died tonight and stood before God and God asked you, ‘On what basis do you think you belong in heaven?’ what would you say?” The young person responds, “I would say, ‘On the basis of the fact that I am a pretty good person. I am better than most, really.’” Paul was inspired to write Romans 3 for that young person. The only ground of justification and the right to eternal life is the righteousness of Christ, no works of ours!

Say another young person comes to the consistory to make confession of faith. The minister asks, “Do you trust in the righteousness of Christ alone as the ground for your standing before God?” The young person responds, “Yes, I do.” The minister then asks, “Do you try to live a life of good works out of gratitude to God for that gift of justifying righteousness and the right to eternal life?” And the young person responds, “No, not really. I don’t need to. Salvation is based on grace alone, so I can live however I want and sin as I please. I am not a murderer or anything, but I don’t really try to go against the grain of my flesh. I am guaranteed a place in heaven anyway.” James was inspired to write the second part of James 2 for that young person.

Paul is concerned with the doctrine of justification by grace alone, totally apart from works. James heartily agrees with that truth. But he is concerned here that that faith that alone justifies, apart from works, is a true faith. And the way faith is shown to be genuine is by the works that follow it. You can legitimately translate James 2:14 this way: “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can THAT faith save him?” THAT kind of faith, that does not go on to desire and live in good works, is not real, genuine faith, even if a person tells you it is. It is false faith, dead faith. True faith proves itself by works—not works done to earn a standing before God, but works done out of gratitude.

Is your faith and mine genuine? If we have received the gift of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us freely for nothing in ourselves, faith cannot but go on to show its gratitude in a life that magnifies God’s holy name. If that is not your faith, look to the righteousness of Christ alone truly as your standing before God, and may God grant you living faith! If it is your faith, then how marvelous a reality is yours! Saved by grace alone, show him your gratitude today in a holy life, the only life worth living!

Memory Verse: *Galatians 5:6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.*

Meditation #3
James 2:21-22
Rev. Cory Griess

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

Here James seems to put the lie to everything we said yesterday. Does he not explicitly say, "Abraham was justified by works"? But there are different meanings to words. The English word "bark" can refer to what is on a tree, and also to the noise a dog makes. So too the biblical word for "justify" can have two meanings. It can mean "to declare righteous," and it can mean "to vindicate as real or genuine." For example, Jesus uses the word that second way in Matthew 11:19 when he says, "But wisdom is justified of her children." Wisdom is vindicated, shown to be genuine, by its children, or by its effects. So too James is pointing out that Abraham's faith, by which alone he was justified (in the sense of declared righteous, v. 23), was a *faith that was justified* (in the sense of vindicated as genuine, vv. 21, 22) by his works.

You can see the point James is making by going back to the story of Abraham. It is in Genesis 15:6 that we read of Abraham believing in God's salvation by the gift of faith. Then, much later (seven chapters later), we read of God's test of Abraham's faith. He must take his son Isaac, in whom the hope of the covenant was contained, and offer him up.

James is then, by the Spirit, continuing his earlier line of thought. What a man may call faith is not true faith unless it is shown to be genuine in his life. Abraham's faith in Genesis 15 is shown to be genuine by the good work he performed under the test in Genesis 22. Hence the conclusion, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?" And verse 24: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified (vindicated as a real and genuine believer), and not by faith only."

It is important that we understand this for our own rest in the gospel and our own confident defense of it. When the Roman Catholic Church and the theologians of the Federal Vision movement speak of justification as being by faith and our good works, they always refer to this passage. Let us defend the glorious gospel and the unity of scripture by carefully understanding the Word of God!

We also need to defend the truth from those who teach that if a person raises his hand in the church service or "accepts Christ into his heart," but then goes off to live like the world, that person is yet a genuine child of God. He has Christ as Saviour, but not as Lord. Not so, James is reminding us. True faith will show itself in the godly life, where, though one struggles every day, he strives out of the new man to love, honour, and obey the gracious, justifying God. That life justifies (vindicates) faith!

Memory Verse: *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.*

Meditation #4
James 3:13
Rev. Cory Griess

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

The purpose of the book of James is to call God's people to a life of real and practical holiness as the evidence of God's work in them. This call, James knows, will be used of the Spirit to form the life of faith in the maturing people of God. Thus, James says by inspiration, it is not only what a man claims about his faith that proves it is true faith, but it is what his life claims about it. The same is true of wisdom. Many people claim to be wise. All people who claim to be Christians claim to be wise. James challenges our confession. Who is a wise man? True wisdom will show itself in the life one lives.

Wisdom is conforming one's thinking and life to God's pattern of thinking and living set forth in his Word. Such a life will have a certain flavor to it, we are told in James 3:13. That flavor is the flavor of meekness ("...with meekness of wisdom"). The wise one's good works will come forth out of a meekness that reveals wisdom. Meekness is humility: first of all humility before God as one realizes his own frailty, sinfulness and his own natural lack of wisdom, and therefore receives God's Word humbly as the rule for his life. Meekness is also humility before others: before our spouses in marriage, our children, our parents, our neighbors. Are you meek? Meekness is not weakness. It is not rolling over and giving up one's convictions in order to please another. It is holding one's convictions with selfless love and humility. It is performing good works without seeking to draw attention to oneself. It is living a holy life in such a way that it is not about me or my glory, but it is about the glory of God.

The opposite way of life is one filled with envying, strife, bitterness, and lies, all in an effort to seek one's own glory (v. 14). No matter how much a person says he is wise, if this is his life, he is filled with the folly of the devil himself. James 3:15: "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish." In fact, by nature all our wisdom is this folly. We are self-seeking to the core, except God works in us the "wisdom that is from above" (v. 17), a wisdom that comes from the ascended Christ, who lived in the wisdom of meekness.

That wise life of works done in meekness is a beautiful life. The word for "good" is literally "beautiful." "Let him show out of a beautiful conversation..." Don't you want a beautiful life, lovely after the beautiful life of our Lord? Can you think of an older saint, perhaps even one now in glory, who, though not regarded by the world, lived a lovely, beautiful life as James describes it? The world lives ugly, self-promoting lives. Live in meekness and in humble, selfless love that seeks God's honor. This is wisdom.

Memory Verse: James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

Meditation #5
James 4:4
Rev. Cory Griess

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

When God calls his people to himself, he calls them into a relationship, a marriage. This relationship is his covenant. He binds himself to his people and binds his people to himself by planting the seed of new life in their hearts and giving them his own Spirit.

This relationship is a friendship. There are other kinds of relationships. There are business relationships. You pay your grocer, and he lets you take home some of the groceries he has in his store. But a friendship is one where there is mutual love and fellowship. It's a relationship where things that please the other person in the relationship are done not to be paid in return, but because there is a bond of love there. This is the covenant into which God brings us.

This relationship is not of equals. God is our friend-sovereign, and we are his friend-servants. He is Lord as well as friend. We serve in loving obedience, him who redeems us and directs our lives.

This relationship is exclusive. When God brings his people into this bond he forbids all other friendships of this kind. It is like the friendship of marriage. To have the union of love and friendship with someone outside your marriage is adultery. So too, to have the kind of love and fellowship where we act as though a spiritual bond is there between us and another when it is not, is spiritual adultery. This would be to pretend that something else is our friend-sovereign and we are its friend-servants. This would be to attack the friendship we have with God.

The world is constantly trying to get us to have that fellowship with it, and to pretend that bond is there between it and us when it is not. It sends out its siren song to us, telling us to find life in it and not in God. It tells us that what it commands is good and right; we must serve it and its principles, and then we will be happy. It will even at times say that we can have the bond with both it and God. But it lies. It immediately presses upon us all that makes us enemies of God. One cannot have two lovers, nor two masters.

What will it be, the world or God? We must live *in* the world, to be sure. We must be friendly with worldly people, to be sure. We must love and serve any and all. But we must not be friends of the world. Who are you living for? Who are you serving? Whose principles govern your life? Whose spiritual arms are you found in? God forgive us our adultery, and may the words of James shake us awake if we are flirting with the world. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" Oh God, forgive our foolishness! Take us back in thy love. There is nothing for us in the arms of the world. This bond with thee is our life and hope and joy!

Memory Verse: *Ezekiel 16:15 But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was.*

Meditation #6
James 4:12
Rev. Cory Griess

There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

The question is intended to humble us. James saw improper judging in the church. And as a good pastor he gets to the heart of the issue, pride. Who are you?

There is a proper judging in the church that is done on the basis of the Word of God and in humility. We are to go “the way of Matthew 18” with erring brethren, having made a *judgment* that their life or doctrine is in opposition to God’s Word. But even when we do that, we are to go in humility, not in pride. Pride turns even a right judgment wrong.

But pride can also lead us to make wrong judgments of our brethren, with nothing right about them. This was what James was seeing. People were making judgments of their brothers and sisters in the church on the basis of their own ideas about how things should go and not on the basis of the law of God. This happens in two ways.

First it happens in legalistic judging. Say someone believes it will be best for them not to have a smartphone. They believe there is too much temptation that comes along with it, and they will do better spiritually without it. That can be a good and wise decision. But if that person starts to believe that it is a sin to have a smartphone and then judges everyone in the church who does, he is guilty of the wrong kind of judging James speaks of. He has unmoored himself from judging others on the basis of the law of God.

Second, judging on the basis of one’s own ideas can happen in licentious judging. Say someone has a smartphone and they are watching lust-filled things on it. A brother comes to that person and says, “This is a violation of the seventh commandment, my brother. Put it away.” The man responds, “Legalist! I can watch what I please! Who are you to bind me? I am free in Christ.” That brother who charged legalism is also guilty of improper judging. God’s law does forbid him to watch lust-filled material on his phone.

James says that in both cases we not only judge our brother, we judge God himself and his law! In the first we say, “God, your law is too loose. You failed in writing your law, God; I will help by adding to it.” In the second, we say, “God, your law is too strict. It is not loving. I have decided the law should be more loose in this area.” James 4:11: “He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.”

Here is the pinnacle of pride. When we do this, James says, we attempt to push God out from behind the bench and slide into the judge’s chair and judge his law. We must humble ourselves and realize he is wise and we are to bow before his judgment; and realize that in his judgment we have all sinned in this regard. Let us bow ourselves down all the way to the foot of the cross and find hope in Christ, who perfectly loved, obeyed, and judged on the basis of God’s holy law.

Memory Verse: *Psalm 119:97 O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*

Meditation #7
James 4:14
Rev. Cory Griess

Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Oh how quickly we begin to think we are in control! Man discovers things, invents things, builds things, all in an attempt to control his own life, to determine his own future. How easily even the child of God forgets that, for all his plans and all his devices, he still is unable to know with any certainty what will happen even tomorrow. James saw this especially in the businessmen of the church. James 4:13: "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:" They had it all planned out. Notice the *ands* in the verse. We will do this, *and* this, *and* this, *and* then this will happen. They failed to even consider that God would overrule their plans.

The problem was not that they planned. The Bible calls us to plan ahead (Prov. 6:6-8). And James does too. Notice, he does not rebuke them for saying we will do this, and then this, and then this. He rebukes them for not adding a qualifier: "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:15). Make your plans, but add this qualification that shows you acknowledge God is sovereign over your plans and may change them.

How we need this reminder. God's will is his decree or counsel that determines all things. It is powerful. Our plans will not cause His will to cower, but our plans will melt before whatever he has decreed. His will is unchangeable. Our plans will not derail what he has determined, but what he has determined will derail our plans if his plans are not ours. His will is unknowable. We cannot know in advance what his will is and make our plans accordingly. Therefore, we must always make our plans recognizing his will may be otherwise.

To fail to do so is a pride of the basest sort. "What is your life? Who do you think you are? Your life is but a vapour. You are a mist on the face of this earth, here today, gone tomorrow. You think you are in control? You think you determine the future? You think you can usurp the place of God? You are nothing. Your phones, schedules, vehicles, insurance plans, and all the rest do not change the fact that you are weak, transient beings. I am God, and my will will be performed." Let us make our plans today, but bow before him whose plans may not be ours, and trust that if his plans foil ours, he, the changeless, sovereign God, does what is best.

Memory Verse: *Luke 12:6-7 Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.*