

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO JAMES 2

In this chapter the apostle dissuades from a respect of persons, on account of outward circumstances; shows that the law is to be fulfilled, and that mercy is to be exercised, as well as justice done; and exposes the folly of such who boast of faith without works: he dissuades the saints from all partiality to the rich and poor, from their relation to one another, as brethren, and from their common faith, of which Christ, the Lord of glory, is the object, (^{<S001>}James 2:1) supposes an instance of it, either in a court of judicature, or a religious assembly, (^{<S002>}James 2:2,3) and then makes an appeal unto them, and expostulates with them about it, (^{<S003>}James 2:4) and makes use of an argument against it, taken from the divine conduct, and an instance of his grace in the choice of persons to eternal life, (^{<S004>}James 2:5) a conduct very different from some persons here blamed, (^{<S005>}James 2:6), and other arguments follow, dissuading from a respect of persons, taken from the characters of rich men, as oppressors of the poor, litigious and quarrelsome with their neighbours, and blasphemers of the name of God, (^{<S006>}James 2:7) and from the law of God, which requires the love of the neighbour, and which to fulfil is to do well, (^{<S007>}James 2:8) and from the breach of it, by having respect to persons, whereby its penalty is incurred, (^{<S008>}James 2:9) for which a reason is given; because whoever offends in one point of the law, is guilty of the whole, (^{<S009>}James 2:10) as is a clear case, since the same lawgiver that forbids one sin, forbids another; so that he that is guilty of either of them is a transgressor of the law, (^{<S010>}James 2:11) wherefore it is right both to speak and act according to it, since men will be judged by it, (^{<S011>}James 2:12) and he will have no mercy shown him that has shown none to the poor, but merciful ones will escape damnation, (^{<S012>}James 2:13) and then the apostle argues from the unprofitableness of faith itself without works, (^{<S013>}James 2:14) and which he exemplifies in the case of a poor brother or sister who are wished well, but nothing given them; which good words, without deeds, are of no profit, (^{<S014>}James 2:15,16) so in like manner, faith without works is a dead faith, (^{<S015>}James 2:17) nor indeed can it be made out that a man has faith, if he has not works, (^{<S016>}James 2:18) at least such a faith as has justification and

salvation connected with it; his faith, at most, is no better than that of the devils, who are damned, (³¹²⁶James 2:19) and that such a faith is a dead faith, (³¹²²James 2:2) and that true faith is attended with, and evidenced by works, the apostle proves by two instances; the one is that of Abraham, whose faith appeared to be genuine, and he to be a justified person, by the works he did; particularly by offering up his son Isaac; in which way his faith operated, and showed itself to be sincere and hearty; and the Scripture was fulfilled that Abraham was a believer; and had righteousness imputed to him, and was a friend of God, and a justified person, (³¹²¹James 2:21-24) and the other instance is that of Rahab, whose faith was also shown by her works, and so a justified person, by receiving the spies with peace, and dismissing them with safety, (³¹²⁵James 2:25), and then the apostle explains what he means, by saying more than once, that faith without works is dead; which he illustrates by the simile of a man's body being dead, without the spirit or soul in it, (³¹²⁶James 2:26).

Ver. 1. *My brethren*, etc.] As the apostle is about to dissuade from the evil of having respect to persons, this is a very fit introduction to it, and carries in it an argument why it should not obtain; since the saints are all brethren, they are children of the same Father, belong to the same family, and are all one in Christ Jesus, whether high or low, rich, or poor:

have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [the] Lord of glory, with respect of persons: that is, such as have, and hold, and profess the faith of Christ, ought not along with it to use respect of persons, or to make such a distinction among the saints, as to prefer the rich, to the contempt of the poor; and in this exhortation many things are contained, which are so many arguments why such a practice should not be encouraged; for faith, whether as a doctrine or as a grace, is alike precious, and common to all; and is the faith of Christ, which, as a doctrine, is delivered by him to all the saints, and as a grace, he is both the author and object of it; and is the faith of their common Lord and Saviour, and who is the Lord of glory, or the glorious Lord; and the poor as well as the rich are espoused by him, as their Lord and husband; and are redeemed by him, and are equally under his government and protection, and members of his body: the Syriac Version reads, “have not the faith of the glory of our Lord Jesus”, etc. meaning either the glory which Christ is possessed of, whether as the Son of God, in the perfections of his nature, or as man and Mediator, being now crowned with glory and honour, and which is seen and known by faith; or else that glory which Christ has in his hands, to bestow upon his

people, and to which they are called, and will appear in, when he shall appear, and about which their faith is now employed: and since this glory equally belongs to them all, no difference should be made on account of outward circumstances, so as to treat any believer with neglect and contempt.

Ver. 2. *For if there come unto your assembly*, etc.] The place of religious worship where saints are assembled together for that purpose; though some think a civil court of judicature is intended, and to which the context seems to incline; (see ^{<306>}James 2:6)

a man with a gold ring; on his finger, which shows him to be a man of dignity and wealth; so those of the senatorian and equestrian orders among the Romans were distinguished from the common people by wearing gold rings; though in time the use of them became promiscuous ^{f16}; the ancients used to wear but one ^{f17}, as here but one is mentioned; and only freemen, not servants, might wear it: however, by this circumstance, the apostle describes a rich man, adding,

in goodly apparel; gay clothing, bright shining garments, glistening with gold and silver, very rich and costly, as well as whole, neat, and clean:

and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; mean and despicable, filthy and ragged: in the courts of judicature with the Jews, two men, who were at law with one another, might not have different apparel on while they were in court, and their cause was trying: their law runs thus ^{f18};

“two adversaries (at law with each other), if one of them is clothed “with precious garments”, (μυργυ μυδgb, “goodly apparel”,) and the other is clothed with ^yywzb μυδgb, “vile raiment”, (the judge) says to the honourable person, either clothe him as thou art, while thou contendest with him, or be clothed as he is, that ye may be alike, or on an equal foot.”

Ver. 3. *And ye have respect to him that wears the gay clothing*, etc.] Take notice of him, and show favour to him, to the neglect and contempt of the other. This is an instance of respect of persons condemned and dissuaded from:

and say unto him, sit thou here in a good place; the best place; whether it be in a religious assembly, or in a civil court of judicature:

and say to the poor, stand thou there; or in a lower and meaner place:

or sit thou here under my footstool; this also was contrary to the Jewish canons^{f19}, that one should sit, and another stand, while their cause was trying; the law runs thus:

“one shall not sit, and another stand, but both shall stand; but if the sanhedrim, or court, please to let them sit, they sit; but one does not sit above, and the other below; but one by the side of the other.”

Ver. 4. *Are ye not then partial in yourselves,* etc.] That is, guilty of such partiality as must appear to yourselves, and your own consciences must accuse you of; or do not ye distinguish, or make a difference among yourselves, by such a conduct, towards the rich and the poor:

and are become judges of evil thoughts; or “are distinguishers by evil thoughts”; that is, make a distinction between the rich and the poor, by an evil way of thinking, that one is better than the other, and to be preferred before him.

Ver. 5. *Hearken, my beloved brethren,* etc.] As to a matter of importance, and worthy of attention and regard; being an instance of the divine conduct towards the poor, and carries in it a strong argument against respect of persons:

hath not God chosen the poor of this world? this interrogative is equal to a strong affirmative; and the sense is, that God has chosen the poor of this world; and which is to be understood, not of the choice of them to an office, either in church or state; though sometimes this has been the case, as the instances of David, and the apostles of Christ, show; nor merely to the Gospel, and the outward means of grace, though the poor have the Gospel preached unto them; nor of the effectual calling, though this is true; but of eternal election, which is the act of God the Father, and passed before the foundation of the world; and is an act of sovereign grace, and is irrespective of faith, holiness, and good works; and is the source of all grace, and remains immutable and irrevocable: now the objects of this are, “the poor of this world”; that is, who are poor with respect to the things of this world, but not with respect to the things of another world; for they are chosen to be heirs of a kingdom, and shall enjoy it; though these are not all chosen by God, nor are they the only persons that are chosen; there are some poor men that are not chosen, and are miserable here and hereafter;

and there are some rich men that are chosen; but for the most part, or generally speaking, they are not many mighty, nor noble, but the poorer sort, which God has made choice of to partake both of grace and glory. It may be the apostle has some peculiar respect to the poor among the Gentiles, whom God had chosen; it was usual with the Jews to call the Gentiles the world, and they were Jews the apostle now writes to, and who were scattered abroad among the Gentiles; and therefore he might very aptly call them “this world”, among whom they lived; and suggest to them, that God had chosen some of the Gentiles, as well as of the Jews, and even some of the poorer sort of them; and it was usual with the Jews to distinguish between **l arçy yyn** [, “the poor of Israel”, and **μl w[yyn** [, “the poor of the world”, or **μl w[h twmwa yyn** [“the poor of the nations of the world”^{f20}: the Alexandrian copy, and some others, leave out the word “this”, and so the Syriac and Arabic versions, which makes the phrase more agreeable to the Jewish way of speaking. The Gentiles, in common, were despicable with the Jews, and especially the poor of them; and yet God chose these:

rich in faith; not that they were so, or were considered as such, when chosen, and so were chosen because of their faith; for then also they were, or were considered as heirs of the kingdom, which would be monstrously absurd; and yet there is as much reason, from the text, for the one, as for the other; but the sense is, that they were chosen “to be rich in faith”; and so the Syriac version supplies in the next clause, “that they might be heirs”; which if it had been placed before this clause also, would have been right; election to grace is signified in the one, and election to glory in the other: men are chosen, not because they do believe, or shall believe, but that they might believe; and which faith they have in consequence of election; and which when they have, they are rich: faith is a rich precious grace itself; it is a part of the riches of grace, and is more worth than thousands of gold and silver; and it is the means of receiving and enjoying much riches, as Christ the pearl of great price himself, and all spiritual blessings along with him; such as the rich robe of his righteousness, full pardon of sin, which is according to the riches of his grace, and adoption, which makes men heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, and even the eternal inheritance itself, both the promise of it, and a right unto it; all which are said to be received by faith; and therefore believers, how poor soever they may be, to this world's goods, are truly rich men:

and heirs of the kingdom; of glory, which is prepared for all the chosen ones, from the foundation of the world; and is freely given to them by their Father, and to which they are called in the effectual calling; and hence they are made kings and priests unto God, and have crowns and thrones provided for them: the Alexandrian copy reads, “heirs of the promise which he hath promised to them that love him”; that is, which God has promised them, as the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions read; not that their love to God is the cause of this kingdom, or of their choice to it, or of the promise of it to them; all which flow from the love of God to them; but this is descriptive of the persons who shall enjoy it, and may expect to enjoy it, as in (³⁰¹²James 1:12).

Ver. 6. *But ye have despised the poor*, etc.] Or dishonoured, and reproached them, by showing respect of persons, in preferring the rich to them, and in distinguishing them in such a manner as was to their contempt and injury; which is a reproaching not only of them, but their Maker; and is in effect saying, that God has done either a weak or a wrong thing, in choosing them to be rich in faith, and heirs of a kingdom, it being directly contrary to his conduct:

do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? which may be understood either of rich men that were unbelievers; and these either the Heathen magistrates, who ruled over them in a tyrannical way, and with rigour, and often summoned them before them, and persecuted them with violence; or their own countrymen, the Jews, who stirred up the chief men of the Gentiles against them, and drew them to their judgment seats, as they drew Paul to the judgment seat of Gallio, (⁴⁴³⁰Acts 13:50 18:12) or else of rich professors of religion, who assumed a despotic power over the poor brethren of the church, and loved to have the pre-eminence over them, as Diotrefes did, and set up tribunals in the churches, and tried and condemned them in an arbitrary way; or else upon civil accounts had them before heathen magistrates, and went to law with them in their courts, before unbelievers, which is a practice condemned in (⁴⁴⁰⁰1 Corinthians 6:1), and seeing now rich men used them so ill, the apostle mentions this as an argument to dissuade them from respect of persons; seeing they had but little reason to show so much regard unto them, who had treated them in so evil a manner: this is not to be understood of all rich men; nor is the apostle's design to destroy that natural and civil order there is among men, by reason of their different stations, offices, and circumstances; it being highly proper that honour

should he given to whom honour is due, but not to the dishonour of another.

Ver. 7. *Do they not blaspheme that worthy name*, etc.] Of Christ, or Christians;

by the which ye are called? and which, as before, may design either unbelieving rich men, whether among Jews, or Gentiles, who blasphemed and cursed the name of Christ, and compelled others to do so likewise; or such who professed the Christian religion, who by their supercilious and disdainful treatment of their poor brethren, and by their dragging of them to the tribunals of the Heathens, and distressing them with vexatious law suits there, caused the name of Christ, after which they were called Christians, to be blasphemed and evil spoken of, among the Gentiles.

Ver. 8. *If ye fulfil the royal law*, etc.] Which is the law of love to men, without distinction of rich and poor, high and low, bond and free; and is so called, because it is the law of the King of kings; hence the Syriac version renders it, “the law of God”, it is the law of Christ, who is King of saints; and because it is a principal law, the chief of laws; as love to God is the sum of the first and great commandment in the law, and may be called the king of laws; so love to the neighbour is the second and next unto it, and may very well bear the name of the queen of laws, and so has royalty in it; and indeed this last is said to be the fulfilling of the law, (^{4513B}Romans 13:8-10 ⁴⁵¹⁴Galatians 5:14) and it is also submitted to, and obeyed by such who are made kings and priests to God; and that in a royal manner, with a princely spirit, willingly, and with all readiness: the same word, in the Hebrew language, *pybydn*, signifies “princes”, and to be willing. The Jews frequently ascribe royalty to the law, and often speak of *hrwt rtk*, “the crown of the law”^{f21}; and they suppose the Israelites had crowns upon their heads, when the law was given them on Mount Sinai, in which were engraven the name of God, and which they were stripped of when they made the golden calf^{f22}: now this royal law is fulfilled, when it is regarded without respect of persons,

according to the Scripture, in (^{4518B}Leviticus 19:18)

thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself; and which is to be understood of every nation, without distinction of Jews and Gentiles, and of persons of every state and condition, rich and poor, without any difference: and when this law is so observed, it is commendable:

ye do well: that which is right, and which is a man's duty to do; this, when done from right principles, and to a right end, is a good work, and is doing a good work well.

Ver. 9. *But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin,* &c] This is not doing well, but is a transgression of the law, as every sin is; hence it follows,

and are convinced of the law as transgressors; which carries on a formal process against such persons; it accuses them of sin, and charges them with it; it proves it upon them, and convicts them of it; it pronounces them guilty, and curses them for it; and passes the sentence of condemnation and death upon them; wherefore care should be taken not to commit this sin, and so fall under the convictions and reproofs of the law.

Ver. 10. *For whosoever shall keep the whole law,* etc.] Or the greatest part of it, excepting only in one point, as follows: Adam, in a state of innocence, was able to keep the whole law, but by sin he lost that power, nor can any of his posterity now keep it perfectly: they are all transgressors of it, and liable to its penalty; unregenerate men are not obedient to it, and have an aversion to it, and despise it, and cast it behind their backs; regenerate persons, who love it, and delight in it, after the inner man, do not keep it perfectly; the several parts of the law may be indeed kept by a believer, and that sincerely, but not to a perfect degree, for in many things they all offend; Christ only has perfectly kept it, and is the fulfilling end of it for righteousness; men of a pharisaical disposition may fancy they have kept it wholly, as the young man in the Gospel, and Saul, before his conversion; but this is but a fancy, and a sad mistake: the case in the text is only a supposed one, and, as it is here put, implies perfection; for it follows,

and yet offend in one point; sin, which is a transgression of the law, is an offense to God the Father, who is of purer eyes than to behold it; to Jesus Christ, who loves righteousness, and hates iniquity; and to the blessed Spirit who is grieved and vexed by it; and to the justice of God, which being injured by it, demands satisfaction; and to the law of God, which accuses, convinces, reproveth, and condemns for it. The word used signifies to "fall", and designs more than stumbling, even an open breach and violation of the law; and which being made, by any, in a single instance,

he is guilty of all: this seems to agree with some common sayings of the Jews, that he that is suspected in one thing, is suspected in the whole law ^{f23}; and he that keeps this or the other command, keeps the whole law; and he that breaks this, or the other command, breaks the whole law; as whether it respects the sabbath, or adultery, or that command. Thou shall not covet, or any other ^{f24}: and this must be understood, not of every particular command in the law, as if he that is guilty of murder is in that instance also guilty of adultery; or he that is guilty of adultery is in that instance guilty of murder; but the sense is, that he is guilty of the breach of the whole law, though not of the whole of the law; as he that breaks anyone condition of a covenant, which may consist of many, though he does not violate every condition, yet breaks the whole covenant; so he that transgresses in anyone point of the law, breaks the whole, commits sin, and is deserving of death, and is treated by the law as a transgressor of it, let it be in what instance it will. But it does not follow from hence, that all sins are equal, as the Stoics say ^{f25}, for there are greater and lesser sins, (~~491~~ John 19:11) though not some venial, and others mortal, for the wages of every sin is death; nor that the punishment of sin will be alike, as all sins were punishable alike by Draco's laws, but not by the law of God, (~~412~~ Matthew 11:22,24) but this may be fairly concluded from hence, that there can be no justification in the sight of God, by an imperfect obedience to, the law, or by a partial righteousness: the law requires perfect obedience, and in failure of that, though but in one point, curses and condemns; and likewise it may be inferred from hence, that a man is not at liberty to obey and neglect what commandments of the law he pleases, but should have respect to them all; which seems greatly the design of the apostle, as appears by what follows.

Ver. 11. *For he that said, Do not commit adultery*, etc.] That same lawgiver, who is but one, and is God, that gave out the seventh command, and forbids adultery,

said also, Do not kill; delivered the sixth command, which forbids murder.

Now if thou commit no adultery; do not break the seventh command;

yet if thou kill, break the sixth command,

thou art become a transgressor of the law; not of that particular precept of the law, the seventh command, for the contrary is supposed before, but of the sixth only; and yet by so doing, a man becomes a violator of the whole

law; for the law is but one, though it consists of various precepts; and the breach of one precept, as well as of another, is the breach of the law: and besides, there is but one lawgiver, who has enjoined one command, as well as another, and whose legislative power and authority is despised and trampled upon by the violation of one command, as of another. This is the apostle's argument, and way of reasoning, proving the above assertion, that he that breaks the law in one particular instance, is guilty of the breach of the whole law.

Ver. 12. *So speak ye, and so do*, etc.] Both words and actions should be taken care of; it becomes men to observe what they say, and what they do; for both sinful words and works are transgressions of the law, and will be brought to judgment; every idle word, as well as every evil work, both open and secret, men must give an account of in the day of judgment: wherefore it is incumbent on them so to behave,

as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty: (See Gill on “³⁰²⁵James 1:25”) with which compare (³⁰¹²Romans 2:12,16). Heathens will be judged by the law of nature, Jews by the law of Moses, and those who live under the Gospel dispensation, according to the Gospel of Christ.

Ver. 13. *For he shall have judgment without mercy*, etc.] Strict justice, and no mercy shown him:

that hath showed no mercy; to the poor brethren, and distressed members of Christ, but has shown respect of persons to the hurt of the poor, and has despised and oppressed them, instead of relieving and comforting them; so the rich man, that neglected Lazarus at his gates, is refused a drop of water to cool his tongue; and the servant that cruelly insisted on his fellow servant's paying him all he owed, justly incurred the displeasure of his Lord, and was by him delivered to the tormentors; and that servant that beats his fellow servants will be cut asunder, and, have his portion with hypocrites; and such who have seen any of the brethren of Christ hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and in prison, and have showed no regard for them, will hear, “Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire”:

and mercy rejoiceth against judgment; that is merciful men, who have shown mercy to the poor saints, will not be afraid of the awful judgment, but rather rejoice or glory, as the word signifies, in the view of it, since they will obtain mercy at that day, and hear, Come, ye blessed of my Father, etc. (¹⁰³⁴Matthew 25:34-36) so the Ethiopic version renders it, he

only shall glory in the day of judgment, who hath showed mercy; the Alexandrian copy reads in the imperative, “let mercy glory”, etc. and the Syriac version, “be ye exalted by mercy over judgment”.

Ver. 14. *What doth it profit, my brethren*, etc.] The apostle having finished his discourse on respect of persons, and the arguments he used to dissuade from it, by an easy transition passes to treat upon faith and works, showing that faith without works, particularly without works of mercy, is of no profit and advantage:

though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? it is clear that the apostle is not speaking of true faith, for that, in persons capable of performing them, is not without works; it is an operative grace; it works by love and kindness, both to Christ, and to his members; but of a profession of faith, a mere historical one, by which a man, at most, assents to the truth of things, as even devils do, (~~312B~~ James 2:19) and only says he has faith, but has it not; as Simon Magus, who said he believed, but did not.

Can faith save him? such a faith as this, a faith without works, an historical one, a mere profession of faith, which lies only in words, and has no deeds, to show the truth and genuineness of it. True faith indeed has no causal influence on salvation, or has any virtue and efficacy in itself to save; Christ, object of faith, is the only cause and author of salvation; faith is only that grace which receives a justifying righteousness, the pardon of sin, adoption, and a right to the heavenly inheritance; but it does not justify, nor pardon, nor adopt, nor give the right to the inheritance, but lays hold on, and claims these, by virtue of the gift of grace; and it has spiritual and eternal salvation inseparably connected with it; but as for the other faith, a man may have it, and be in the gall of bitterness, and bond of iniquity; he may have all faith in that sense, and be nothing; it is no other than the devils themselves have; and so he may have it, and be damned.

Ver. 15. *If a brother or sister*, etc.] A Christian man or woman, a fellow member of a church of Christ; for this relation is to be understood in a spiritual sense, though it does not exclude such who are in this relation in a natural sense:

be naked; or clothed in rags, or in very mean and sordid apparel, such as will neither keep them warm, nor clean and decent; for they must not be supposed to be entirely naked, but to be in a very uncomfortable and indecent garb:

and destitute of daily food; have not food sufficient for the day; or aught to support nature with, and yield them proper refreshment and nourishment.

Ver. 16. *And one of you say unto them*, etc.] That is, one of the same faith, and in the same communion and church fellowship.

Depart in peace; wishing them all prosperity and happiness, inward and outward:

be ye warmed and filled; clothed and fed; signifying, that they wished them all the accommodations of life:

notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body; neither clothes to wear, nor food to eat; nothing to warm their bodies, or fill their bellies:

what doth it profit? the Ethiopic version reads, “what doth it profit them?” either the poor brother, or sister, to whom these good words are given, and nothing else; for these will neither warm them, nor fill them; or the persons themselves, that say these tidings to them: and the apostle, by this instance, shows, that as that charity which lies only in words, and in tongue, and not in deed, and in truth, is unprofitable, and good for nothing, even to them that profess it; so that faith, which a man says he has, and yet is without works, is alike unprofitable unto him.

Ver. 17. *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*] It is like a lifeless carcass, a body without a soul, (^{sm26}James 2:26) for as works, without faith, are dead works, so faith, without works, is a dead faith, and not like the lively hope and faith of regenerated persons: and indeed, such who have no other faith than this are dead in trespasses and sins; not that works are the life of faith, or that the life of faith lies in, and flows from works; but, as Dr. Ames observes ^{f26}, good works are second acts, necessarily flowing from the life of faith; to which may be added, and by these faith appears to be living, lively and active, or such who perform them appear to be true and living believers.

Ver. 18. *Yea, a man may say, thou hast faith, and I have works*, etc.] That is, a true believer in Christ may very justly call upon a vain boaster of his faith, who has no works, to give proof and evidence of it, and address him after this manner; you say you have faith, be it so that you have; I have works, you see I have, I say nothing about my faith at present; now,

shew me thy faith without thy works, if thou canst; see what ways, means, and methods thou canst make use of, to make it appear to me, or any other, that you have the faith you talk of: the words are a sort of sarcasm and jeer upon the man, and yet very just, calling upon him to do that which is impossible to be done, and thereby exposing his vain boast; for faith is an inward principle in the heart; an hidden thing, and cannot be seen and known but by external acts; and where it is right, it is operative, and shows itself by works, which is not practicable in those who have none:

and I will show thee my faith by my works; there may be indeed an appearance of good works, where there is no faith, as in the Heathens, in the Scribes and Pharisees, and in the Papists, and others; and on the other hand, there may be the principle of faith implanted, where there is not an opportunity of showing it by a series of good works, or a course of godly living, as in elect infants dying in infancy, and in those who are converted in their last moments, as the thief upon the cross; wherefore works are not infallible proofs and evidences of faith, yet they are the best we are capable of giving of it to men, or they of receiving. In short, works may deceive, and do not infallibly prove truth of faith, yet it is certain, that where they are not, but persons live in a continued course of sinning, there cannot be true faith.

Ver. 19. *Thou believest that there is one God*, etc.] These words are a continuation of the address of the man that has works, to him that boasts of his faith without them, observing to him, that one, and a main article of his faith, is, that there is one God; which is to be understood in the Christian sense, since both the person speaking, and the person spoken to, were such as professed themselves Christians; so that to believe there is one God, is not merely to give into this article, in opposition to the polytheism of the Gentiles, or barely to confess the God of Israel, as believed on by the Jews, but to believe that there are three persons, Father, Son, and Spirit, and that these three are the one God; wherefore this article of faith includes everything relating to God; as to God the Father, his being and perfections, so to Christ, as God, and the Son of God, and the Messiah, etc. and to the Holy Spirit; and to believe all this is right:

thou doest well; for that there is but one God, is to be proved by the light of nature, and from the works of creation and providence, and has been owned by the wisest of the Heathens themselves; and is established, by divine revelation, in the books both of the Old and of the New Testament;

what has been received by the Jews, and is well known by Christians, to whom it is set in the clearest light, and who are assured of the truth of it: but then

the devils also believe; the Arabic version reads, “the devils likewise so believe”; they believe the same truth; they know and believe there is but one God, and not many; and they know that the God of Israel is he; and that the Father, Son, and Spirit, are the one God; they know and believe him to be the most high God, whose servants the ministers of the Gospel are; and they know and believe that Jesus is the Holy One of God, the Son of God, and the Messiah, (^{<4167>}Acts 16:17 19:15 ^{<4168>}Luke 4:34,41).

And tremble; at the wrath of God, which they now feel, and at the thought of future torments, which they expect, (^{<4169>}Mark 5:7 ^{<4170>}Matthew 8:29) and which is more than some men do; and yet these shall not be saved, their damnation is certain and inevitable, (^{<4171>}2 Peter 2:4 ^{<4172>}Jude 1:6) wherefore it follows, that a bare historical faith will not profit, and cannot save any; a man may have all faith of this kind, and be damned; and therefore it is not to be boasted of, nor trusted to.

Ver. 20. *But wilt thou know, O vain man*, etc.] These are the words of the apostle reassuming the argument, that faith without works is dead, useless, and unprofitable; and the man that boasts of his faith, and has no works to show it, he calls a “vain man”, an empty one, sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal; empty vessels make the greatest sound; such are proud boasters, vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind; but are empty of the true knowledge of God, and of the faith of Christ, and of the grace of the Spirit: the Syriac version renders it, “O weak”, or “feeble man”, as he must needs be, whose faith is dead, and boasts of such a lifeless thing; and the Ethiopic version renders it, “O foolish man”, for such an one betrays his ignorance in spiritual things, whatever conceit he has of his knowledge and understanding: the character seems levelled against the Gnostics, who were swelled with a vain opinion of their knowledge, to whom the apostle addresses himself thus. The phrase, “vain man”, is a proper interpretation of the word *aqyr*, “Raca”, or Reka, used in (^{<4173>}Matthew 5:22), (see Gill on “^{<4174>}Matthew 5:22”), which though not to be said to a man in an angry way, yet may be applied to men of such a character as here described; who were empty of solid good, and yet boasted of their knowledge. “Wilt thou know?” dost thou require proofs,

that faith, without works, is dead? as in (⁵¹⁷James 2:17) and that true faith has always works accompanying it, and is shown and known by it? then take the following instances.

Ver. 21. *Was not Abraham our father justified by works*, etc.] Not as the causes of his justification, that is denied, (⁵¹²Romans 4:2) but as effects of it, showing the truth of his faith, and the reality of his justification: he had both faith and works, and the former were known by the latter; and even the faith which he had expressed years ago was manifested, demonstrated, and confirmed to be true and genuine, by the instance of his obedience to God, here produced; by which it appeared he was a true believer, a justified person, approved of God, and loved by him. Now if this was the case of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, yea, the father of the faithful, of all that believe, he is, and must be a vain man, that talks of faith without works; and his faith must be a dead one, and he be very unlike the father of them that believe: the good work instanced in is the offering up of Isaac;

when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar: for when he was bid to take his son, his only and beloved son, Isaac, and offer him up on one of the mountains, that should be shown him, he made haste to do it; he provided everything for it; he split the wood, and carried it with him, and fire in his hand; he built an altar, laid the wood on it, bound his son, laid the wood on the altar, and his son on the wood, and stretched out his hand, with his knife in it, to slay him; so that it was all one, with respect to his intention and will, as if he had actually offered him, and was a full trial and proof of his obedience to God. This was not the only act of obedience, or good work, which he performed; but this being a very eminent one, the apostle instances in it, as a very considerable evidence of his faith in God, and love to him; and which showed him to be a justified person, as he was long before he performed this action, even before Isaac was born; (see ⁴¹⁵Genesis 15:6) and therefore it can never be the apostle's meaning, that he was justified before God by this, or any other good work or works, as cause or causes of it; but only that he was declared to be so; or, in other words, that his faith was attended with good works, and evidenced by them.

Ver. 22. *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works*, etc.] Not to justify him before God; for neither faith nor works are ever said in Scripture to justify any man; but his faith being of the right kind, a faith which works by love, it put him upon doing this work, and many others; for this was done

in faith, (^{<38117>}Hebrews 11:17-19) as all good works are, which are properly such; and where there is true faith, it will influence and engage a man to do good works, as it did Abraham.

And by works was faith made perfect? not with an absolute perfection; for though Abraham's faith was very great, yet there were things lacking in it, and he had his fits and times of unbelief; and had he lived till now, his faith, in this sense, would not have been perfect; and he would have had reason to have used the apostle's petition, (^{<42705>}Luke 17:5) much less would it have been made thus perfect by works; but the sense is, that hereby his faith was declared to be sincere, unfeigned, true, and genuine; just as love is said to be perfected, (^{<60417>}1 John 4:17).

Ver. 23. *And the Scripture was fulfilled,* etc.] (^{<01516>}Genesis 15:6) which speaks of Abraham's faith, and the imputation of to him for righteousness; for the above action of Abraham, in offering up his son, was a clear proof of the truth of his faith, there commended: by this it was made known what a strong faith he had in God, and what reason there was to believe that he was a justified person.

Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness; (See Gill on "^{<48018>}Romans 4:3") which shows both that Abraham was justified before he wrought this work, and therefore that could not be the cause or matter of his justification, but only an effect and evidence of it; and that his justification was by faith, or that object which his faith regarded, and had to do with, was his justifying righteousness:

and he was called the friend of God, (^{<44107>}2 Chronicles 20:7 ^{<23408>}Isaiah 41:8) he was loved by God with an everlasting love, who showed acts of friendship to him; called him by his grace, and blessed him with spiritual blessings, and increased him with the increase of God; favoured him with near communion with him, honoured him with high characters, and distinguished him by peculiar marks of his favour, and reckoned his enemies and friends as his own; (^{<01218>}Genesis 12:8) and Abraham, on the other hand, loved God, and showed himself friendly to him; trusted in him, and believed every word of his; readily complied with his will, and not only yielded a cheerful obedience to his commands, but enjoined his children after him to observe them: this was a name which Abraham was well known by among the eastern nations; hence he is called by the

Mahometans, *hl l a l y l j* , “Khalil Allah”, the friend of God; and Mahomet says himself^{f27} ,

“God took Abraham for his friend.”

Ver. 24. *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified*, etc.] Not as causes procuring his justification, but as effects declaring it; for the best works are imperfect, and cannot be a righteousness justifying in the sight of God, and are unprofitable in this respect; for when they are performed in the best manner, they are no other than what it is a man's duty to perform, and therefore cannot justify from sin he has committed: and besides, justification in this sense would frustrate the grace of God, make void the death of Christ, and encourage boasting in men. Good works do not go before justification as causes or conditions, but follow it as fruits and effects:

and not by faith only: or as without works, or a mere historical faith, which being without works is dead, of which the apostle is speaking; and therefore can bear no testimony to a man's justification; hence it appears, that the Apostle James does not contradict the Apostle Paul in (~~ERR~~ Romans 3:28) since they speak not of the same sort of faith; the one speaks of a mere profession of faith, a dead and lifeless one; the other of a true faith, which has Christ, and his righteousness, for its object, and works by love, and produces peace, joy, and comfort in the soul. Moreover, the Apostle Paul speaks of justification before God; and James speaks of it as it is known by its fruits unto men; the one speaks of a justification of their persons, in the sight of God; the other of the justification and approbation of their cause, their conduct, and their faith before men, and the vindication of them from all charges and calumnies of hypocrisy, and the like; the one speaks of good works as causes, which he denies to have any place as such in justification; and the other speaks of them as effects flowing from faith, and showing the truth of it, and so of justification by it; the one had to do with legalists and self-justiciaries, who sought righteousness not by faith, but by the works of the law, whom he opposed; and the other had to do with libertines, who cried up faith and knowledge, but had no regard to a religious life and conversation; and these things considered will tend to reconcile the two apostles about this business, but as effects declaring it; for the best works are imperfect, and cannot be a righteousness justifying in the sight of God, and are unprofitable in this respect; for when they are performed in the best manner, they are no other than what it is a man's duty

to perform, and therefore cannot justify from sin he has committed: and besides, justification in this sense would frustrate the grace of God, make void the death of Christ, and encourage boasting in men. Good works do not go before justification as causes or conditions, but follow it as fruits and effects:

and not by faith only: or as without works, or a mere historical faith, which being without works is dead, of which the apostle is speaking; and therefore can bear no testimony to a man's justification; hence it appears, that the Apostle James does not contradict the Apostle Paul in (^{<813>}Romans 3:28) since they speak not of the same sort of faith; the one speaks of a mere profession of faith, a dead and lifeless one; the other of a true faith, which has Christ, and his righteousness, for its object, and works by love, and produces peace, joy, and comfort in the soul. Moreover, the Apostle Paul speaks of justification before God; and James speaks of it as it is known by its fruits unto men; the one speaks of a justification of their persons, in the sight of God; the other of the justification and approbation of their cause, their conduct, and their faith before men, and the vindication of them from all charges and calumnies of hypocrisy, and the like; the one speaks of good works as causes, which he denies to have any place as such in justification; and the other speaks of them as effects flowing from faith, and showing the truth of it, and so of justification by it; the one had to do with legalists and self-justiciaries, who sought righteousness not by faith, but by the works of the law, whom he opposed; and the other had to do with libertines, who cried up faith and knowledge, but had no regard to a religious life and conversation; and these things considered will tend to reconcile the two apostles about this business.

Ver. 25. *Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot*, etc.] (See Gill on ^{<813>}Hebrews 11:31") justified by works; this woman was an instance of the grace of God in calling the chief of sinners, and was a true believer; and what she did, she did in faith, (^{<813>}Hebrews 11:31) and her faith was shown by her works to be true and genuine; and it was manifest that she was a justified person. This instance is produced with the other, to show, that wherever there is true faith, whether in Jew or Gentile, in man or woman, in greater or lesser believers, or in such who have been greater or lesser sinners, there will be good works; and therefore that person is a vain man that talks and boasts of his faith, and depends upon it, and slights and rejects good works as unnecessary to be done.

When she had received the messengers: the spies that Joshua sent, into her house, with peace and safety:

and had sent them out another way; than they came in, even through the window upon the town wall, (^{<BIB>}Joshua 2:1,15).

Ver. 26. *For as the body without the spirit is dead,* etc.] This simile is made use of to illustrate what the apostle had asserted in (^{<BIB>}James 2:17,20) that as a body, when the spirit or soul is departed from it, or the breath is gone out of it, is dead, and without motion, and useless; which the Jews^{f28} express in like manner, *j wr al b Pwg rgp*, “the body without the spirit”, or “breath, is a carcass”.

So faith without works is dead also: a vain thing, useless and unprofitable, can neither justify, nor save, nor prove that a man is justified, or will be saved.