

## **Authentic Living** **James 1:19-2:13**

**INTRO:** My son fell far from the family tree in two areas. First he is quite good at mathematics. In fact, he has a PhD. in mathematics and works as an actuary for an insurance company. He works with statistics and mathematical formulas. I work with ideas and concepts. A second way he differs from me is that he likes to cook and I don't. Period. However, one of the things I learned a short while ago is the importance of preparing and maintaining an iron skillet.

Suppose you were to overhear me giving the following instructions to someone for curing and cleaning an iron skillet. But you hadn't heard that we were talking about an iron skillet. All you heard was the following instructions: before your pan is used the first time and then periodically after you clean it, the pan must be cured or seasoned. Scour your pan with a scouring pad, and then cover it with shortening inside and out. Put it on a foil covered cooking sheet (for easy cleanup) in a preheated oven at 350° for 20 minutes. Then allow your pan to cool.

What if some time later a friend asked you how they should clean their Teflon coated pan? What would happen if you gave them the instructions I had given my friend for his pan. It would ruin his Teflon pan! While both the iron skillet and the Teflon skillet are pans used for frying, they are not cleaned the same way.

This is true of the book of James itself and understanding the difference between the meanings of faith and works in James and in the writings of Paul. They use the same terms for people attempting to live the Christian life in two different ways. Ways that deny the meaning and power of the gospel.

Please keep this in mind as we look at this passage.

Recap from last week.

We discovered that the book of James was most likely written by the half-brother of Jesus about the mid 40's AD. This was prior to the Jerusalem Council in AD 49 and thus prior to the Gentile controversy. It was also before Paul had written his letters of Romans, Ephesians and Galatians that spell out the doctrine of the gospel and salvation by grace. Therefore, the book of James must be read with the lenses of grace to understand it correctly.

We discovered that James was written to Jewish Christians, many of whom had fled from Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen and persecution at the hands of the Jewish leaders. Thus, James addresses the issue of suffering and God's faithfulness to accomplish His purposes in the lives of Christians who are being transformed and purified as they trust in God, in spite of the suffering of various kinds.

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We discovered that those who maintain their trust in God in spite of suffering, He holds up before the universe as *the first fruits* of those who will be saved for eternity. God sees us as the beginning of the harvest of people who will put their trust in God as they see us trust in Him in our day to day living.

With that in mind the next section answers some questions that James knew would be raised about what it means to be first fruits of faithful believers in God's ability to transform and change us.

### **1. What does it look like to be the first fruits that God puts on display? 19-ff**

In our speaking (vs. 19-20)

*We must be quick to **listen** to others*, so that we understand their journey with God, slow to speak, so that we do not become judgmental of others, and slow to show anger when we are mistreated or when we think that others are not living up to the high calling of belonging to God. In Jesus' interactions with others, he listened first, then responded in such a way that even when he pointed out their sins and failures, they still felt loved and cared for.

*We must **put off** wickedness and put on righteousness.* The word put off is the word for taking off one's clothes and putting on different clothes. The word for filthiness is the same word used to describe the filthy rags of the high priest in Zechariah 3. Thus James has in mind our taking off the filthiness of our own righteousness and putting on the pure white robe of Christ's righteousness. How do we do this? James does not leave us to discover it for ourselves. It takes place when we surrender our lives to the authority of God's Word.

When God's Word is implanted in our minds and hearts, our obedience becomes more than a checklist to be followed. It becomes more than fearful acquiescence. When the Word is humbly received in our lives, we become surprised to learn that our obedience exceeds that of outward conformity. (See Matthew 25:31-46)

Perhaps James had the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:33-34 in mind when he spoke of the implanted word. **Jeremiah 31:33-34 (ESV)** <sup>33</sup> *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* <sup>34</sup> *And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

When I was growing up, my grandmother gave my brothers, sisters and me a Bible. Inside she wrote the following words: "This book will keep you from sin, sin will keep you from this book." She may not have realized it, but she was teaching us the importance of the implanted Word for our lives.

James goes on and calls us to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. James is not calling for obedience apart from grace. He assumes grace as the starting point. Perhaps this quote from the Tyndale Bible Commentary will help.

*James wants to stress to his hearers that the good news of salvation brings with it an unavoidable, searching demand for complete obedience. James characterization of the Law as 'perfect' suggests that these commandments must be seen in the light of Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament law (Matthew 5:17). With the searching, radical demand of the gospel*

*comes the enabling grace of God. When Jesus called people to 'come' to him and to take his yoke upon them, he promised that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).*

***To be first fruits that God puts on display means that we allow God's grace to transform us from the inside out so that we reveal His character to others.***

## **2. How Can I Know I am living as an authentic Christian? 1-7**

We will treat people with impartiality. We will not honor the rich and ignore or look down on the poor. We will not treat people differently based on their race, education or social standing. Not even based on their religious beliefs! We will not show partiality. Before moving on, we must all admit that partiality crops up all too easily in our lives. We all have partialities based on our values, beliefs and perceptions of what is important in life to us and to others.

Apart from God, we tend to receive our self worth from three things.

- 1) The things we have or possess. Our financial assets—or lack of them.
- 2) The work we do and/or the role we play in the lives of others. And finally
- 3) what others say about us. The value we receive from them.

The problem is, each and every one of these things can be gone in a moment. And then we are left floundering to see ourselves as valuable at all. Which is why we must receive our value from how God sees and thinks about us. The God of the universe sees us as his beloved sons and daughters!

God values people because they are created in His image. God sees them for what they can become, through His grace. We are to do the same. We must see others through the lenses of God's grace and the perspective of God's unconditional love.

***To live as authentic Christians means we value everyone as God's child.***

## **3. What if I fail? 8-13**

This section of James is often misunderstood and misapplied. It can be made to state the opposite of what James intended.

Most of the time we focus on three verses in this section. They are: James 2:10-12 (ESV): <sup>10</sup>For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. <sup>11</sup>For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup>So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

Most Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, use these verses to show that the 10 commandments condemn us as breakers of God's law. Seventh-day Adventists also use it to show that the 10 commandments are all still valid for Christians living on this side of the Cross. Furthermore, they are sometimes used to show that we are to keep ALL the commandments, including the 4<sup>th</sup>. Some Seventh-day Adventists use it in an arrogant fashion to say that we keep all ten, since we observe the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment by keeping the Sabbath. Using it this way is a misapplication of James' purpose and intent. James is not saying that we become authentic Christians when we arrive at perfect obedience by keeping all 10 commandments. How do I know this?

We must also keep in mind that James says if we *fail* in keeping one commandment we break them all. He is not talking about a deliberate breaking of the law but an unintentional breaking of the law (the original meaning of the word fail) through a misstep, oversight or impetuous act.

The context that surrounds these verses is critical. When James said we should be doers of the word and not hearers only, he made 2 points. The first was that the law functions like a mirror to show us our sin (1:23-25). Just as a mirror can only reveal dirt on our face and not clean our face, **so the law can reveal our sins but not remove them.** And just as trying to ignore the dirt on our face by walking away from the mirror that reveals the dirt, neither can ignoring the guilt created by the law's revelation of our sins remove sin from our lives. To prove his point, James uses the very same examples of what it means to break the law that Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount--murder and adultery. Remember what Jesus said about them? Anyone who lusts or hates commits adultery and murder. With that in mind, who can say they have never broken those? And if they have broken either of those, they have broken them all.

Finally, the last two verses of this section provide James' conclusion for what it takes to be authentic Christians. He refers to the law as the law of liberty. It is only the law of liberty if it is written in the heart that results in true obedience. It is a matter of transformation and not mere imitation, an obedience motivated by a sense of duty or fear or an obedience that follows a "checklist" to gain acceptance from God.

More importantly, James reminds us that authentic religion or Christianity is revealed when we treat others with the same kind of compassion Jesus demonstrated in His life and ministry. He has already stated that pure religion is when we take care of those in need (orphans and widows) and when we are unstained by the world's values and philosophies. In short, it is revealed when we show mercy to others.

At the same time, we reveal authentic Christianity when we receive the mercy offered us for those times. James is making the same point that John made when he wrote the following: *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Notice the similarities. We are to avoid sin and try to keep the entire law (1 John 2:1).* Those who have received God's mercy and forgiveness and who respond to others with mercy reveal authentic Christianity.

***Authentic Christianity is revealed when we allow mercy to triumph over judgment.***

With all this in mind, let's go back to our illustration of the iron skillet. Using James' admonition to be doers of the word and not just hearers to promote perfectionism is the same as applying the directions for cleaning an iron skillet to cleaning a Teflon pan. And when we pull the texts about breaking one commandment results in breaking them all out of context and ignore the summary about mercy triumphing over judgment, we ruin the Teflon coating of God's grace on our lives and the lives of others.