**Faith Foundations 2021-2022**

**The Catholic Epistles**

**Session 4**

**In this week’s session, we will be reading the first half of James 2, which is dedicated to discussing the sin of partiality. Because Jesus has shown no partiality to us in saving all types of people (e.g.—Jew and Gentile, poor and rich, male and female, etc.), we Christians are called to show no partiality to others in turn. Of course, this is easier said than done for us sinful people…**

**Read James 2:1-7. What hypothetical situation does James use to illustrate the sin of partiality?**

**How hypothetical is this situation actually in our congregations? How often do things like this happen in reality?**

**How are we ourselves tempted to partiality in such situations? Can you think of specific examples?**

**What does James say about people who show partiality? What have they become?**

**How does God’s perspective reverse the typical human views of the poor and the rich? What has He promised to the poor?**

**How did Jesus Himself embody God’s choice of the poor to receive His blessings?**

**Why is it ironic that James’ readers would be so eager to please the rich?**

**Why might the rich have behaved this way in James’ time? Do wealthy people today face some of those same temptations?**

**Read James 2:8-13. What does it mean for a person to “fulfill” the Law? To what degree is it possible for us to do this?**

**What commandment does James use as a summary of the Law? Does this ring any bells about anything Jesus might have said during his ministry (hint: see Mark 12:28-31)?**

**How well does a person need to keep the Law in order to fulfill it properly? What happens when one fails at one point of the Law?**

**What does it mean in this particular situation to show mercy? What does this have to do with partiality?**

**James again calls the Law the “law of liberty.” How does this address the issue of partiality specifically? How is showing mercy to the poor an act of liberty?**

**What does it mean that “mercy triumphs over judgment?” Does this mean that Christians should accept everybody’s life choices and never point out the sins of anyone else?**

**Of course, striking the proper balance between judgment and mercy is very difficult for Christians. The Scriptures tell us to be merciful to those in need, including people caught in sins, but there are times when the most merciful thing one can do is help a person to repent of their sins and ask for forgiveness. The discerning Christian will properly distinguish between Law and Gospel and ask for God’s help in applying them to particular situations they encounter.**

**Regardless, James’ warnings about the sin of partiality are well taken, as Christians should never forget that Jesus came specifically to save broken people who had been treated terribly at the hands of the devil, the world, and their own sinful natures. When we discriminate against such people, we turn our backs on people for whom Jesus died. The proper Christian attitude is to welcome all and invite everyone to repent and believe in their Lord and Savior.**

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**The Catholic Epistles**

**Session 4**

**This week’s session will probably be the most difficult one that we have all year, as we will be studying a portion of James’ epistle that appears to directly contradict a key Christian teaching that we find in other parts of the New Testament, especially the epistles of Paul. But we will also find that, if we apply proper interpretive principles, this passage not only will not be problematic for us, but will actually enrich our understanding of the proper relationship between faith and works in the life of a Christian. For that reason, it will be valuable for us to study this text.**

**Read James 2:14-17. According to James, can faith without good works save a person?**

**What example does James use of someone who does not do good works when he or she has the opportunity? Do we ourselves ever do anything like this?**

**Why would James say that faith without works is dead? What does this tell us about the relationship of faith and works?**

**How does this passage from James serve as a corrective to Christians (and Lutherans especially) who would claim that since we’re saved by grace and not by works, we can do whatever we want with our lives?**

**Read James 2:18. How does the “someone” in this verse misunderstand the relationship between faith and works?**

**How do our works show our faith?**

**Can we have true faith if it is not accompanied by good works? Why or why not?**

**Can we do truly good works if they are not accompanied by faith? Why or why not?**

**Read James 2:19. According to James, how are Christians and demons similar?**

**Is the faith of Christians and the “faith” of demons the same? If not, how is it different?**

**Read Galatians 2:20. How is Paul’s description of faith different from that of James?**

**Could Paul and James be using the term “faith” in different ways? If so, how?**

**One thing we need to remember as we read Scripture is that it is the product of multiple human authors, and as such they have different ways of expressing themselves and using various terms. We should not expect each biblical author to employ the exact same style of writing or to use their terms in the exact same way. Understanding the context in which these words appear helps us to sort out the various interpretive issues that can arise when we compare these passages.**

**Read James 2:20-26. What is James’ main point in this passage?**

**What are the two examples from the Old Testament that he uses to prove his point?**

**Read Genesis 15:1-6 and 22:1-19. How do these texts illustrate James’ point?**

**Read Joshua 2:1-24 and 6:15-25. How do these texts illustrate James’ point?**

**Read Romans 4:1-25. How does Paul’s interpretation of Abraham’s story differ significantly from that of James?**

**How does the homologoumena/antilegomena distinction help us to identify which of these interpretations should serve as the “baseline” and which is the more supplemental one?**

**How, then, should we view this passage from James? Does it establish doctrine, or does it help to clarify a certain aspect of doctrine?**

**What is the main message that we should be taking away from this passage in James?**

**Although James would appear to directly contradict Paul, this does not necessarily need to be the case. James should be understood as a corrective to those who would abuse Paul’s writings and the Gospel itself to justify immoral behavior. His basic point is that faith and works always go together; one cannot claim to be a Christian and then refuse to live his or her life according to the teachings of God’s Law. Remember, though, because Paul’s writings are homologoumena, his treatment of these issues gets priority over James’ in the sense that it serves as the “baseline” for all of our discussion about faith and justification. We read James in light of Paul, and not the other way around. When we apply these principles, we find that James does not threaten the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ at all, and he actually helps us to understand it a bit better. Thus, though Martin Luther may not have liked James all that much, the book still has much to contribute to our approach to the Christian life of faith.**