

## BECOMING REAL

James 2

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James seems to be focusing his letter around the subject of being 'Real Christ followers', not phony or false. Last week Alex concluded chapter 1 with the challenge in v.27, about a pure or faultless faith practice. Since there are no chapter divisions in the original Greek manuscripts, he leads right into chapter 2, talking about how we often wrongly show favoritism to rich persons. In this chapter, there are three illustrations of how we can see the difference between becoming more authentic Christians, verses being fake or less than authentic.

1. Illustration of a rich person being treated with honor, and a poor person being shunned. v. 1-7

-Apparently there were some wealthy Christians in their fellowship, also most of the early Christ followers were of the lower economic strata, some slaves, many were needy persons who were the outcasts in their culture. The main teaching is summed up in v.5: "Listen, dear brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith, and to inherit the kingdom He promised those who love Him?"

--A GENUINE/AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE IDENTIFIES MORE WITH THE POOR OF THE WORLD, THAN THE RICH/POWERFUL.

-Poor persons know they need God's help, the rich can 'make it on their own', they do not need God!

-Even a wealthy Christian needs to have the mentality of a poor person! We all need God's help!!!

-The first Beatitude Jesus gave was: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

2. Illustration of seeing others thru eyes of mercy/grace, rather than judgment/criticism. v. 8-1

--Looking down on poor persons is a form of judging! The Royal Law of loving our neighbor as ourself is broken when we judge others without holding ourself to the same standard, and none of us likes to be put down or criticized so why do we do it to others?

-In Matthew 7:1-2, Jesus made it clear that we are not to judge others; for if we do, others will certainly do the same to us!

--The key concept is in verse 13: 'mercy triumphs over judgment'. God asks us to be instruments of grace and mercy, more than judging or criticizing others especially when not holding ourselves accountable.

--A GENUINE/AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN CHOOSES GRACE/MERCY OVER CRITICISM AND JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE EVERY TIME

-We are asked to pray for others, or confront them when committing gross sin, but God is going to do the judging, condemning and punishing, in His time and way! God does not need our help doing it!

3. Illustration of the tension of believing vs. acting/doing. It is easy to get locked into one side or the other of this discussion, and it deeply divided the early church. The Jewish converts insisted that people needed to follow Jewish laws (actions), even if they believed in Christ. Gentile believers said it did not matter what else you did, as long as you believed in Christ! It is unhealthy to get hung up on either side of this debate. That same tension is felt even today, between people who base their salvation on what they do, vs. those who say you only need to believe in Christ!

-James sums it all up in v. 26, when he says: 'As the body without spirit (breath) is dead, so faith without deeds is dead!' Or meaningless, or less than authentic.

--A GENUINE/AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN'S FAITH WILL BE EVIDENCED BY HOW THEY ACT

--Words about God's love, have validity only when we put those words into actions! I John 3:16-18

-Faith and belief are internal, but our actions/deeds are observable/external, and useful in sharing God's love in tangible ways which go beyond words.