

**THE
GRACE
BIBLE**

JAMES 2

SAMPLE CHAPTER

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What is The Grace Bible?

My only aim is to complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace. (Acts 20:24)

The good news of God’s grace declares that God is not mad at you, he’s mad about you. The One who sits on a throne of grace blesses you, not because you are good, but because he is good and he longs to be good to you.

Grace declares that God is for us and with us, and he freely gives us everything we need for life and godliness. Grace invites you to come in from the cold, rest from your labors, and feast at the table of his abundance. Grace is what makes the new covenant new and the good news *good news*.

If you have ever asked, “How do I read this scripture through a new covenant lens?” *The Grace Bible* is for you.

This book is not a law Bible with rules to follow, nor is it a works Bible that tells you what to do. It is not a judgment Bible to fear, or a guilt Bible to make you feel bad. It is a *grace* Bible that reveals the good news found on every page of scripture.

In this study Bible, you will find no guilt or condemnation and none of the usual calls for blood, sweat, and tears. Our focus will be on Jesus Christ—who he is, what he has done, and what you can do because of what he has done.

The Grace Bible is for the weary and those tired of pretending. It’s for the burned out, the fed up, and the knocked down. It’s for those who are in distress, or debt, or are discontented.

It’s for all of us who need grace.

James 2

James 2:1

¹ My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

2:1 **Brethren**; see Jas. 1:16.

Hold your faith. Some read this verse as, “You have to hold on to your faith in Jesus,” as though everything depended on your faith. That is not what James is saying. A literal translation of his words reads: “Hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is not about your faith, but his faith. We are justified and declared righteous because Jesus was faithful.

“You hold fast to my name and did not deny my faith,” said Jesus to the Pergamenes (Rev 2:13). In the new covenant, God takes the lead and we respond. We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19), and we believe in him because Christ first believed in us. He is our supplier of faith, hope, and love.

Faith; see Jas. 2:14.

Lord Jesus Christ. The Jews called Jesus *Rabbi*, but Christians call him Lord and Christ.

When Jesus walked the earth he was known as Jesus of Nazareth (e.g., Matt. 26:71). After he ascended to heaven he was given a new name above every name, and that name is Lord (Php. 2:9–11). The original word for Lord (*kyrios*) means the One who is supreme above all. “You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am” (John 13:13).

Personal favoritism. Don’t let social distinctions stain your Christian walk. Since Christ died for all, treat everyone as precious and valued by God.

The church is an egalitarian institution. We make no distinctions on the basis of race, gender, or class (see Gal. 3:28). Yet in some assemblies, the rich and powerful were given preferential treatment while the poor were being treated shabbily. James condemns this type of discrimination.

James 2:2-4

² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool, ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

2:2 **Assembly.** The original word (*sunagoge*) is normally translated synagogue. James expected that his letter to the twelve tribes would be read in Jewish synagogues (Jas. 1:1).

When the apostle Paul entered a new city, he typically preached first in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 17:1-2). Similarly, the scattered Jews that carried the gospel message (and James’ letter) from Judea to their home countries, proclaimed the good news in their assemblies. To a large degree, the Christian church was birthed in Jewish synagogues.

Gold ring. A gold-ringed man was a man of status and wealth, or someone pretending to be.

Fine clothes. It is the way of the world to give special treatment to those who are bejeweled, well-dressed, and have the appearance of success. But in the kingdom we regard no one from a worldly point of view (2 Cor. 5:16). Everyone is precious in God’s eyes.

2:3 **The good place.** The seat of honor. The front row.

The poor man. In this world the poor and downtrodden get the scraps. They are exploited, oppressed, and they get the worst seats. For this reason, the poor receive special attention from the Lord (see Jas. 2:5).

2:4 **Distinctions.** Discrimination based on race, gender, or wealth has no place in the new covenant (Gal. 3:28).

Judges. To judge people based on outward appearances (their looks, clothes, status, social media following, etc.) is to judge with evil or worldly standards. God does not look at people this way. He looks at the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

James 2:5-7

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

2:5 **Beloved brethren;** see Jas. 1:16.

The poor. If the gospel is good news for anyone, it's good news for the poor and downtrodden (Luke 4:18, 6:20).

Jesus has nothing against the rich and comfortable, but the rich often have trouble receiving from the Lord (Matt. 19:23). Not so the poor. With empty hands and hungry hearts, they are more than ready to take what Jesus provides.

Rich in faith. Those who have nothing are easily persuaded to receive what God offers. In contrast, those who are rich in this world are often reluctant to let go of that which they cannot keep (Matt. 19:23).

Heirs of the kingdom. While the rich and powerful often dismissed Christ, the poor received him with joy (Luke 7:22). For this reason Jesus said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20).

2:6 **Dishonoured.** You mistreat those who have been chosen by God (see previous verse).

Oppress you. Yet you honor those who mistreat you. It makes no sense.

Court. The rich and powerful use the law to oppress the weak and indebted.

2:7 **Blaspheme.** To blaspheme is to slander or speak falsely. James is saying, "Why do you show preferential treatment to the rich when they mock and belittle the name of the Lord?"

The fair name. The precious, beautiful, and most honorable name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Called. God calls all of us to come out of darkness and enter into his wonderful light (1 Cor. 1:24, 1 Pet. 2:9). Not everyone

responds to his call, but those who do are known as “the called of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:6).

James 2:8–9

⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well.

⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

2:8 **If.** The conditional *if* indicates that this is a law-like statement. James is quoting law to people who had been raised under the law to reinforce his point about not showing partiality (see next verse). He is not suggesting that we should turn to the law to curry favor with God. No one can improve their standing with God by attempting to keep the law (Rom. 3:20).

The royal law is to love your neighbor as yourself (Lev. 19:18). This commandment is the king of laws because loving others fulfills all the other laws (Rom. 13:8–9, Gal. 5:14). In context, it means treat people with dignity, even if they are poor, and don’t show favoritism (Jas. 2:1, 5). The royal law is analogous to the golden rule (do unto others as you would have them do unto you; Luke 6:31), but it should not be confused with the law of liberty (Jas. 1:25).

You are doing well. How wonderful the world would be if we kept the law to love our neighbors. But this is an impossible law for fallen humanity. History proves again and again that we cannot love our neighbors. To keep the royal law we need the new and higher law of Christ: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Only the love of God can empower us to love others.

2:9 **Partiality.** If you judge people on external appearances and treat some people better than others (see Jas. 2:1–4).

You are committing sin. You are violating those old covenant laws that forbid showing partiality (e.g., Lev. 19:15, Deu. 16:19).

Just as all are equal under grace, all were equal under the law. The same laws that governed one governed all. No one was above the law and no one could receive special treatment without violating the law.

Transgressors. Lawbreakers.

To those under the law, these are strong words. “Mistreat the poor, and you are breaking the law.”

James 2:10–11

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not commit murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

2:10 **The Law.** Since James is writing to the scattered Jews (Jas. 1:1), the “whole law” is the Law of Moses, namely the commandments, ordinances, punishments, and ceremonial observances given to the nation of Israel through Moses (Jos. 8:31, John 1:17). This law is sometimes referred to as the law of commandments (Eph. 2:15), or the law of the Jews (Acts 25:8).

In the new covenant, we are not under law but grace (Rom. 6:14). So when James preaches law one could get the impression that he was confused about the difference between the covenants. He was not. Like Jesus addressing the crowds, James was capable of preaching to two audiences at the same time. Those who shared his faith in Christ got grace, while the self-righteous and smug got the harsh and unforgiving law.

Yet stumbles in one point. The standard demanded by the law is flawless perfection. Those who live under it are obligated to keep all of it (Gal. 5:3). This presents an insurmountable problem, for we all stumble in many ways (Jas. 3:2). Imperfect humanity is incapable of delivering a perfect performance.

Guilty of all. Like Jesus before him (John 7:19), James upheld the high standard of the law. He esteemed the law and the purpose for which it was given. The law was given to silence every mouth and hold the whole world accountable (Rom 3:19). James does not preach the law as a guide for you to live by. He preaches the law so that you will become conscious of your sin and see your need for a Savior.

2:11 **Do not commit adultery** is the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14).

Do not commit murder is the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13). Later in this letter, James will accuse some of breaking this commandment (Jas. 4:2, 5:6).

Transgressor. Lawbreaker. Break one part of the law and you will be judged guilty of breaking all of it (see previous verse). Some believe that God will accept them if they are mostly good. The law demolishes this deception. A holy God demands perfection. Either you must be perfectly obedient every hour of your life, or you need a high priest who was perfectly obedient on your behalf. Only the sinless Savior can present us to God without fault or blemish (Eph. 5:27, Heb. 4:15, 1 Pet. 1:22).

James 2:12–13

¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

2:12 **Those who are to be judged.** Live knowing that we will all be judged by our response to Jesus (2 Cor. 5:10).

The law of liberty is the liberating rule of the Lord Jesus (see Jas. 1:25).

2:13 **Merciless.** Those who live by the merciless law shall receive no mercy, for the law condemns all and justifies no one (Rom. 3:19–20, Gal. 2:16).

The one who has shown no mercy is the one who lives by the cold and unforgiving standard of the law, and whose life remains untouched by the grace of God. They are unable to show mercy because they have not received mercy. They don't want it. They would rather stand on their own merits than receive the mercy of a compassionate God.

Mercy is one facet of God's grace (Heb. 4:16). Just as God is rich in grace (Eph. 1:7, 2:7, Jas. 4:6), he is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4, Jas. 5:11). He is the God of all grace (1 Pet. 5:10) and the Father of all mercies (2 Cor. 1:3).

Mercy triumphs. Just as God's grace is greater than our sin (Rom. 5:20), his mercy triumphs over the condemnation of the law. The bad news of the law is that you are a transgressor, for nobody is perfect. But the good news of grace is that God justifies the sinner (Rom. 3:24).

James 2:14

¹⁴ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

2:14 **Faith.** The original word (*pistis*) is a noun that means persuasion or conviction. Faith is being persuaded that God is who he says he is, has done what he said he's done, and will do what he has promised to do. Abraham was fully persuaded or convinced that God would do what he had promised (see Rom. 4:21).

Works. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is the action that reveals our faith. It may seem strange to think of believing as a work, but believing in Jesus is *the* work of God (John 6:29). We are exhorted to be doers and not merely hearers of the word (Jas. 1:22). To be a doer of the word is to receive, with humility, the word of truth that can save our souls (Jas. 1:21). To receive is to accept, believe, trust, and rely on the promises of God regarding our salvation. If faith is a noun – the state of being persuaded that God saves you by grace alone – then

believing is the verb or activity that flows from that persuasion. We do not believe in order to create faith. Rather, believing is the action that reveals our faith. “Having the same spirit of faith... we also believe” (2 Cor. 4:13).

James does not leave us guessing when it comes to works of faith. He says we need to submit and draw near to God (Jas. 4:7–8). We need to humble ourselves and receive his grace (Jas. 4:6, 10). We need to hold onto the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jas. 2:1).

Sadly, many think that James is preaching good works or charitable works as a substitute or complement to faith. As a result, they try to balance the grace of God with their own works. “I am saved by grace, but I have to prove my salvation through good works.”

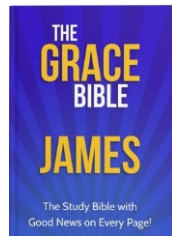
There is no balancing grace with works (Rom. 11:6). It’s one or the other, not both. Any works done to earn or maintain right standing with God are dead works.

Can that faith save him? We all have faith of one kind or another, but not all faith is saving faith. Faith that is unaccompanied by the “work” of believing in Jesus is dead and useless (Jas. 2:17, 20).

Faith is only as good as the object in which it trusts. The religious have faith in themselves and their deeds. In contrast, Christians have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work.

[The Grace Bible: James](#)

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