James 2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.

This epistle of the book of James is such a wonderfully difficult book to grasp. That’s because in order to understand the book you must, I repeat, you must make a few assumptions. Without these basic assumptions or presuppositions of faith the book just doesn’t seem to belong to the Bible. It doesn’t seem to belong because the book of James seems to be emphasizing works in order to be saved. Yet it is not. Let’s look.

First, you need to grasp that James is writing to Christians, to those who confess faith in Jesus as the Lord and Savior from sin. These believers know and understand that it is because of Jesus that heaven is theirs. In other words they grasp they are saved by grace through faith alone and not saved by works!

Second, you need to grasp that James is writing to Christians who believe the writings and epistles of the Apostles to be the inspired and inerrant Word of God. In other words, James is not divorced from the rest of Scripture but rather is a compliment to what the rest of Scripture says. So if your understanding of James contradicts any other part of the Bible, then you need to adjust what you think James is saying.

Third, James is a book that is not addressing the heart of the faith but rather the practice of our faith. In other words, James is not speaking of justification, how you get saved in Jesus, because of Jesus and God’s gracious forgiveness in Jesus. James assumes justification and is presenting lessons, extended lessons on how this justification of Jesus is to impact our lives. Yes, James is teaching lessons on sanctification. I would define sanctification as, “What I do, how I live once I grasp the joy and wonder of Jesus!” In other words, James is a book that speaks directly and clearly on the issue of living your faith, living the Christian life because of the wonder of Jesus. James wants you to grasp that faith cannot be some sort of stagnant thing, a thing of just the mouth and the heart is not involved. Thus we find that James gives example after example of what a living faith might look like. You don’t just say you love Jesus, you live like you love Jesus. You don’t just wear a cross on your lapel or around your neck, you live that cross and the victory it represents. Example after example of what a living faith might look like and these are by no means all the examples that could be given but nevertheless, timely examples.

If you take all of these things into account as you read the book of James you will get what he is saying. The way I like to illustrate this point is to speak of the world of the fireman. If you claim you are a fireman but you never attend any training, never go to the firehouse, never show up to fight a fire…are you really a fireman? Let’s say you have taken some training, but then stopped being involved. How long before the Fire Chief will tell you to turn in your equipment because you are no longer qualified to be a fireman? And how long will your fellow firemen put up with your bragging about your fire-fighting skills, about your heroics at fires you were never at or even about your importance to the firehouse, when they know you are not involved in any of those things? And what happens when it is discovered that you, the fake fireman, is out there setting all the fires the fireman have been putting out over the last year or so? Somewhere along the line, the real firemen are going to address your fake firemen status and make it clear to everyone and everywhere that you are not, NOT a fireman! Well, that is basically what James is doing in his letter. He is making sure you understand that a Christian means you behave like a Christian!

Let’s then look at our text in James and grasp just what his point is for all of us. Our theme will be: **THE APPLICATIONS OF A LIVING FAITH.**

The first application is really quite easy. As the children of God we are not to discriminate. One of the easiest of lessons to address, especially for James and his fellow Christians was that of “the rich verses the poor.” It is still a problem in some circles today. The visitors walk into your church and they look well off, look just like we want them to and they are much like us, so we show favoritism. Our faith says, “Don’t do that!” Rich, poor, tall, short, skinny, plump, white, black…I think you get the drift. Don’t show favoritism. If you have a visitor in church, then you make that visitor feel welcome and like they belong. After all, each and every one of us needs Jesus in exactly the same way. We are all sinners and we all need the salvation of our Lord and Savior. To show favoritism is called a judgment **“with evil thoughts.”** Very simple and wonderful application. And notice an application that still holds true and can still be understood!

Now be careful here. While we want to make every one feel welcome, we dare not ever compromise God’s Word. While we are all sinners who need a Savior and who wrestle with the issues of temptations and sin we dare not forget that our Lord and Savior does draw some clear lines. So please be aware that there are certain sins, should a person declare their right to do because they no longer believe these things are sin…that is a direct contradiction to what God’s Word says. Then with love we point out the sin and call for that unrepentant sinner to repent and actually follow and believe the Lord (which is the whole point of the book of James!!).

And by the way, as I have practiced it: Should you, my sheep, take up such a life-style where God says you cut yourself off from His heavenly kingdom, as your pastor I will show you your wrong and call for repentance. If you repent, fantastic! If you do not repent and insist that it is your right to sin and that Jesus and His Word can just take a hike, well, we will sinfully separate you from the church. I will still love you. I will still care for you. You will find I will be excited anytime I see you and you can always expect a hug and my care and compassion. My Savior would be the same way. He would be loving so that you could understand you can return to Him and follow His Word, you can repent for this is Jesus’ greatest open door. He would never stop loving you just because you stopped loving Him! If you persist in sin he will not open his door to you (remember the Parable of the 10 Virgins?) but He will still love you though you stopped loving Him!

Or look at the next delineated application of James. You have a brother or sister without food or clothes. Well, don’t just stand there, find a way to help them. Contact people, use your knowledge and resources to get this person the help they need. In other words, do for them what you would want someone to do for you if you were in the same position. Yes, help each other out. That is our faith in action. We don’t just say, but we act and move and do because we just can’t help it in Jesus.

Of course, again the Lord has some interesting parameters here too. The poor, the needy, those who just struggle with the skills and gifts to keep life on the up and up, well, be the most wonderful and understanding person you can be. Help them in their weaknesses and guide them in their strength. Now, if the person’s attitude is that “you people just owe me,” then the Lord has guides. For instance, the Lord says, **“If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”** In other words, the person has to at least have the desire to help themselves and work to improve their circumstances. Our job is to especially help the child of God utilize the gifts they do have from God in the best and most productive way.

Now, I hope that you noticed that in the middle of these examples that James is giving is the text that we highlighted for ourselves. Look at what that says in the context it was written: **“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking it all.”**

I have to tell you I love what James does here. He takes our attitudes, our “I am a really good person, I am just the best of God’s kids” and he reminds us of the reality of our life. Not a single one of us should ever be patting ourselves on the back for how wonderful as God’s children we are. Fact is, as James very subtly shows us, if in but one point, one little corner of the law you have stumbled, then you have a sin problem! He is directing us to always look to ourselves. Don’t spend your time judging others or measuring yourself by others. Spend your time looking at the perfect law of God because when you do that, you will realize that you are a rotten sinner and you desperately need the Savior Jesus.

There is the key to all of this. Our need for Jesus. Because finally, when we truly grasp that Jesus has saved us despite ourselves our whole attitude changes. I am not, the exalted, the holy, the wonderful Terry of the world! I am a sinner in need of Jesus. I need his love and compassion. I need his Word as my help and guide.

I need his law to show me my sins and that I do need Jesus. And maybe your sins are not visible for all to see, but they are there. What James reminds us of is the fact that we sin in “thought, word and deed.” All three count before the Lord. So recognize your sinful status, the battle of sin that you are in and in that be humble, be grateful, and be mindful of the fact that you DO need Jesus!

In this regard, I think that Galatians 5:17 is so helpful to us. It says, **“The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other.”** That passage sums up our Christian life. We have the Spirit of God who leads us to hate sin and desire a life pleasing to God and we have our sinful nature that wants to just do what feels good and no one can tell me what to do…! That is our conflict. To hear and follow the Lord or to turn away from Him and His ways. It is a raging battle. Don’t ever forget you are in that battle and that your call as a child of God is to do and be what the Lord says, not what the world says. James too, is speaking of our battle and giving us guidance in the conflict!

So yes, I need the law of God and then I need the gospel of Jesus too, maybe even more. The Gospel is that message that says God sent His Son to be my atoning sacrifice for sin. Because of what Jesus has done and is doing, He offers to me and all believers the gift of eternal life and salvation. Just because he suffered, died and rose from the dead, Jesus offers us His victory. So his victory becomes ours. His righteousness, becomes ours. His holiness and perfection becomes ours in the eyes of His Heavenly Father. All of this is the gift of faith. I hear and I believe Jesus grants forgiveness and eternal life. I hear and believe that because of His resurrection Jesus is the Son of God and our Savior. Jesus forgives me and all believers. Jesus grants eternal life to me and all believers. Jesus does so because that is why Jesus came in the first place!

And James reminds us of the message of Jesus. “We have sin and He is our Savior from sin” is the message that is to drive us. It impacts us. It motivates us. It leads us to think and act in a completely different way than the world, not because we have to but because we cannot help ourselves! Think of it this way, “if you have two good legs, you are going to walk!” It is what legs help us do. So with Jesus. Jesus gives us two good legs and he calls upon us to walk. And as James hints, “Don’t just tell me you are going to walk, get up and walk!” Put the gift that God has given you into practice. Really, it is what we do as God’s blessed and saved children.

There you have it, the point of James. Don’t just talk the talk, but walk the walk too! Don’t just say you have faith, but show me your faith by what you do. I am sure that in today’s day and age James might have used the illustration, “If you say you love Jesus, then love Him. He says be in Church. He says give Him worship and praise. He says you are to be an encouragement and help to your fellow believers. He says we are to help carry each other’s loads and that we are to pray for and with each other.” Oops! Actually, James does use those illustrations!

So, be truthful to yourself. If you were to really look at and analyze your faith (and notice that I want you to do this only to and for yourself. You have no business trying to analyze the faith of others unless you are the pastor, for that is one job you give to pastors), if you were to look at your faith what would you see? A strong practice of following Jesus? A weak one? Would you guess by your life that you are a believer in Jesus? Could anyone else? In other words, would the way our section in James conclude be true in your life: **“I will show you my faith by what I do.”** Amen.