



Lesson 13 November 28th, 2020

Impartial Love

MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL

Study Scripture – James 2:1-13

Background Scripture – James 2:1-13

Key Verse:

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love him?

James 2:5

INTRODUCTION

What actually is **faith**? In his first chapter James **was** concerned that our understanding of “faith” is too small and very likely inaccurate.

He pointed out that people felt they showed “**faith**” even when they reduced “faith” to some statement about what they believed in. But when we look at their lives, we see that they were acting in a “faith” that was a “faith” that lay behind their actions. Everyone needs a basis for their actions and so when people say one thing and do something else James tells us that the act of faith is the faith that they have which is the foundation for their actions. This “faith” is only as the Dictionary tells us is “**credence, belief, trust, dependence, credit, reliance, confidence, dogma, tenet, creed**”. It is basically complete trust or confidence in someone or something which is not necessarily based on something or someone that is true.

This scriptural definition of **faith** is however “**assurance that the things revealed and promised in the Word of God are true, even though unseen, and gives the believer a conviction that what he expects in faith will come to pass**”.

When there is **faith** it becomes so real and tangible to the believer that they actually possess now what **the word of God** says and promises. These things are tangible.

The problem for believers is whether or not the “faith” that underlay the actions of their lives is **faith** in Jesus Christ. A person might think that they have “faith”, but they might not necessarily have the “**faith of Jesus Christ**” which is the only thing that saves.

The faith that is real or meaningful “faith” for the believer means something which must be demonstrated in the life of the believer. The Commandments of Jesus Christ must have a practical application in the believers’ ordinary life and therefore if the believer really believes

the expression and requirement to **love one's neighbor** this love is important and this **love** would have to be demonstrated.

James therefore insists that showing “favoritism” is doing the direct opposite to the idea of love. Love therefore is the antithesis of selfishness and favoritism is the exact opposite of what it means to have faith in Jesus Christ.

The Dictionary tells us that the opposite of faith is among other things **disbelief, distrust disloyalty faithlessness rejection treachery, skepticism, inconstancy, unbelief, dishonesty.**

James is obviously looking deeply at and examining “favoritism”, something that seems quite minor and trivial or mundane to us. But this is a serious matter. We should therefore ask ourselves as we read this Chapter whether or not James is calling into question the very “faith” of those who show “favoritism”. In other words, one writer states:

“to show favoritism is to fail to belong to the faith that Jesus Christ shows us; it is to fail to follow Jesus”.

Do we therefore believe that some are particularly blessed by God, and this blessing shows, while some are not demonstrably blessed by God in certain ways and this shows, and this means something of extreme importance?

Does the exaltation that comes to those that are in Jesus Christ include the believers’ present exalted spiritual status as well as his or her expected participation in the glorious eternal kingdom to be inaugurated by Christ? Can we classify people different from the way that the Bible classifies them?

If that is so how should we treat believers that belong to the heavenly realm as its citizens according to Philippians 3:20?

If our thinking and behavior is contrary or opposite to the **love** that must exist for all the citizens of heaven without exception, does it not indicate that we do not have the faith of Jesus Christ?

So how do we think?

Is James really telling us that we might not have the **“faith”** of Jesus Christ though we might be fooling ourselves that we have that faith of Jesus Christ?

The test that he proposes is quite simple. When we apply this test, ourselves we might find that we are really on the outside of **“faith”**.

Our Lesson Text today presents to us excellent commands for New Year resolutions for it uncovers false thinking and calls for unreserved obedience to, and trust in God. It calls for resolutions that followers of Christ should make and keep, namely, identifying prejudice, which is showing favor, and rejecting this sin.

There is clearly a labeling of some kinds of behavior as **“sin”**.

In this Text we see clearly that discriminating against the poor and currying favor with the persons who seem to be rich and powerful is forbidden.



But note carefully that there is a second principle, namely, believers should work for the benefit of others in need. It is made clear that this is so because favoritism for the rich and powerful is based on serving yourself rather than serving others, for it declares that the poor can do nothing for you, while the rich and powerful have the potential to give some of their riches and power to you, and so they and their friendship alone should be cultivated.

We should add to this the lesson that we hope everyone reading this should see, namely, that we are therefore now dealing with the principle of trusting in God, for if the professing believer and their church really trusted God for providing for them, they would not be so tempted to favour the rich and powerful.

Let us therefore receive in our hearts the strong cautions given by James in this portion of Scripture.

It would be best for us to understand that we are hearing the wisdom voice of Jesus in the Book of James. In other words, the wisdom James expresses is the wisdom that Jesus Himself expressed directly, and that is why the Texts so closely resemble the wisdom teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in direct quotes and by allusions from it.

In addition, note that the voice of Jesus is apparent in James' references in his book to the return of Jesus Christ and the coming of the great Day of the Lord. Given this fact and its critical importance for believers, James makes 50 imperatives in the 108 verses in his book and uses **"imperative verbs at a higher frequency than any other New Testament book"**.

So, he speaks in his own powerful way to remind us of the coming judgment to encourage us to live the Christian life faithfully.

James is preaching to us in a Christ centered way at every stage of his book and the teaching and preaching's of Jesus is woven throughout all that he states. Note carefully therefore that in James we are hearing the voice of Jesus as He gives us wisdom to live successfully in the present world and reminds us of His coming to judge the quick and the dead.

James accordingly focuses on some of the things which bedeviled believers in his day, and which also twist our behavior in the present day.

We seem to think that social class is not an issue in our modern life. but Christians who think that social class is not a problem should ask themselves how comfortable they are when encountering people who visibly are in a different social class and are outside the networks of friendship created by income levels, education, and professional status.

He presents powerfully that the Scriptures announce God's impartiality as one of His divine attributes and list specific areas where this attribute is demonstrated as it relates to man. You should remember these Scriptures for they should determine how you live.

How much less to him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands, (Job 34:19).

For there is no respect of persons with God, (Rom.2:11).

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: (Acts 10:34).



For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment (Deut.10:18-19).

Even Jesus' enemies recognized His impartiality.

And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth...:

Mark 12:14. (See In 2 Chron.19:7; Mal.2:9; Acts10:35; 1Pet.1:16-17).

This attribute of impartiality like so many of God's virtues is enjoined on all believers in an emphatic manner. The practice of partiality among believers belies the character of God who is impartial and who commands the same of His people and most importantly leaders and judges observe this teaching of God.

He [Jehoshaphat] told the judges, "Be careful what you do, for you are not judging for men, but for the LORD, who will be with you when you make judicial decisions. Respect the LORD and make careful decisions, for the LORD our God disapproves of injustice, partiality, and bribery" (2 Chronicles 19:6-7).

God is impartial in dealing with people and in that way, He is completely unlike us, we are very partial. We tend to exercise some kind of gradation, higher or lower for other people. It has to do with their looks, dress, the kind of car they drive, the kind of house they live in; sometimes it has to do with their color, their job, education and on and on. All of these things collectively and individually mean nothing to God. Simply put, *man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.*

God evaluates a person and accepts them in the Beloved purely and simply and only on the basis of their relationship to Him, their soul, their inner man. The only legitimate favoritism allowed by God is that which allows us to esteem everybody else better than ourselves. "*In lowliness of mind let each regard other better than themselves.*" (Phil. 2:3).

Sadly, in the church outward appearance and externals mean too much to us and we become partial to certain people. This attitude and practice of judging people based purely on externals is so pervasive in the church, it is hardly ever recognized for what it is, sin!

Undoubtedly, armed with the array of Scriptures that speak against this practice, James would not have his readers and us plead ignorance. Obviously, there is a proper place for due respect to a king, to one in authority, to someone who is our elder, but the idea here is regard related only to externals.

One dictionary definition of partiality tells us it is **unfair bias in favor of one thing or person compared with another.**

Another definition: "**Preferential attitude and treatment of a person or group over another having equal claims and rights,**"

One writer comments on the use of the Greek word *prosopolepsia* (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25 and in other texts) as follows:

It is 'the fault of one who when called on to requite or to give judgment has respect to the outward circumstances of men and not to their intrinsic merits, and so prefers, as the more worthy, one who is rich, high-born, or powerful, to another who is destitute of such gifts'.

Another writer helps us to understand what James is saying by looking at some synonyms which may lead to partiality. We should examine ourselves carefully to avoid the trap of partiality. He states:



“Predilection implies a preconceived liking formed as a result of one’s background, temperament etc. that inclines one to a particular preference. We might say that a certain person has a predilection for murder mysteries.

Prejudice implies a preconceived and unreasonable judgment or opinion, usually an unfavourable one, marked by suspicion, fear, intolerance, or hatred. We might say racial prejudice incited a certain lynch mob.

Bias implies a mental leaning in favor of or against someone or something without passing judgment on the correctness or incorrectness of the preference. One might say someone has a bias toward the color blue.

James was dealing primarily with *partiality*”.

Note again that believers should look at these words for they have to be careful about what is inside their heart for it will show up and impeded your witness.

Understand and be careful of the nature of our flesh and that we are naturally drawn as one writer puts it;

“to those that are either similar to us or that we believe might do some good. Even in Christian circles we seem to rejoice more – as if our cause will strengthen, when a celebrity becomes a Christian than when a poor widow does. Jesus seems to have a different heart”.

The Book of James firmly but lovingly sets out a number of tests for its readers to ensure that their faith is actually the **faith of Jesus Christ** and that this **faith** actually works. James started his examination of our hearts and our faith in Chapter one. Genuine faith would be evidenced in the way believers react to trials, how they respond to temptations and their response to the word of God. Here in chapter 2 the challenge is how do you react to the poor and needy who cross our paths. Apparently, some of his readers were ignoring the plight of the poor and downtrodden in their midst and were catering to the rich. James condemned these practices and addressed the problem in a very direct and practical way.

Partiality was not to be regarded as some benign indiscretion, as the Scriptures repeatedly stress God’s impartiality and the imperative that believers show this virtue. The always practical James will focus on partiality in the socio-economic realm in the Study Text. This is an area that easily lends itself to partiality, given that one’s status in this **area** is so readily apparent. He will first announce a principle, give an easy to imagine illustration; he will then highlight the inconsistency of partiality among the brethren, identify the practice for what it is, and he will then make an appeal. Without doubt in most societies and organizations including the church, the poor is very often a neglected and marginalized group. James reminded his readers that the poor were prominent among those chosen by God, a point Paul makes in 1 Cor.1:26. One writer notes:

To show partiality to the rich and to discriminate against the poor is to break God’s law. And to break God’s law in this one matter is to become a violator of the whole law. These Jews to whom James wrote were no doubt scrupulous in keeping other parts of the law, but James says that this is of no value if the law is broken in the matter of dealing equally with our neighbors. Thus, we may not be guilty of breaking the law by committing adultery, but if we murder, then we are lawbreakers anyway. To break the law at one point is to break the whole law. Those who show partiality to others are lawbreakers.

James used the example of favouritism to the rich over the poor, but partiality finds expression in many other situations where the interest of friends, family and those in authority are



avored, while those without connections are ignored. One driving force behind this evil practice is selfishness. Often, we seek to favor those who are in situations to reciprocate, or those who can offer some benefit; but always with an eye to unfairly advance our cause and those of our friends and relatives. James pointedly reminds us of God's disapproval of partiality and of the certainty of the coming judgment, where it will be punished along with all of our other sins.

Let us seriously consider and heed the words of the Apostle as we study our Text and be 'doers' of the word. By the end of this Study, you should know whether you have the **faith of the Lord Jesus Christ** or whether you have a "faith" which is a contrary one which makes you act on the basis of what you believe to be true, but which is not that **faith of Jesus Christ**.

THE TEXT

Verse 1. James begins his assault on the sin of partiality by more or less stating a general principle, namely, partiality is incompatible with faith in Jesus Christ. Can we really hold the faith of Jesus Christ with partiality when He himself has not the slightest bit of partiality? He makes the point that the sin of *προσωποληψια* – *respect of persons*, is the source of mischief for man and his relationship with God. Note that James addresses those who are reading his letter as "*my brethren*" so he is encouraging them with brotherly kindness to practice brotherly kindness.

Partiality or favoritism has the root meaning of a combination of the words 'face' and 'accept'. Thus, it means accepting or rejection on the basis of someone's face or appearance. It came to be used of any form of improper preferential treatment and often means a biased judgment based on external circumstances, such as race, wealth, social rank, etc. It ignores the value of the individual as a person.

The religion of the glorious Jesus Christ now enthroned in heaven (*Lord of Glory*) should not display a blight such as partiality. The world makes a distinction between rich and poor and the rich are considered to be deserving of better treatment than the poor. It should not be so among believers, as God shows no partiality Himself (Deut.10:17; Acts 10:34) and has made all His people equal in Christ. The poor are important to God, a point made earlier, (1:9-11, 27).

"Blessed is he that considers the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble..." (Psalm 41:1)

"O God, thou hast prepared of Thy goodness for the poor." (Psalm 68:10).

"Whoever mocks the poor reproaches his maker." (Prov.17:5).

They only asked us to remember the poor the very thing I also was eager to do. (Gal.2:10).

...faith...the entire truth concerning Jesus Christ.

We are reminded that James wrote to an age very much like ours, very "partial". There was prejudice and hatred based on class, ethnicity, nationality and religious background. People were routinely and permanently categorized as Jew or Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, Greek or barbarian and so on. From the very birth of the church there were allegations of preferential treatment for a certain group, (Acts 6).

Interestingly, the unity and the brotherly behaviour of the early church was an astonishment to the pagan world. They could not understand how Christians despite their weaknesses and the problems they had, could operate with the openness that they did. These Christians were obviously very different in their behaviour. This was a powerful witness.



But clearly, this kind of behaviour in much of the early church did not come automatically. The Apostles and leaders had to teach the people how to behave, and as this case shows, James had to command proper behaviour and stress that the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ was not consistent with partiality.

Verse 2-3. James presents a situation to clarify the issue of showing partiality. Some call this the case of the “near-sighted usher”. We know however that this is a familiar situation in many churches and denominations and that not only ushers are guilty for they represent the mindset of the church.

Here... *assembly*... is a translation of the word ‘synagogue’, which denotes the meeting place of believers, but not just that but also a place where matters of differences among the members of the church are dwelt with in terms of justice, which fits the Jewish background of the readers (1:1).

The *gold rings* and *fine apparel* indicate a man of wealth and importance. He is dressed in an ostentatious fashion and this is intended to make a statement.

...*poor man* refers to a beggar or to one who depends on others for his support. He is wearing all he has and as might be expected his clothes are filthy. The two are not necessarily members of the assembly but those who might just drop in as visitors (1Cor.14:24).

The rich man in fine apparel gets the V.I.P. treatment and is escorted to a cushioned front row seat. The emphasis on his clothes indicates that the usher’s behavior is a reaction to the man’s appearance. In contrast, any place at the back is good enough for the beggar or he can stand off to the side somewhere or even sit on the floor. This by the way is in line with the pattern followed by the Jews in their synagogues. We read that the scribes and Pharisees coveted the most important seats in the synagogue (Luke 11:43; 20:46).

We can be guilty of similar things today. How would we respond to a wealthy person who arrives at a crowded service at the same time as a filthy beggar? Would we be more concerned that the wealthy person be given a good seat than we would the beggar? When we assume that the rich man is more important to God, or more blessed by God, this shows our carnality and that we put too much value on the material.

Any which way it is said, civil respect can be paid, and some differences may be allowed in our carriage towards persons of different ranks, however this respect must never be such as to influence the proceedings of Christian societies in disposing of the offices of the church or in any thing that is purely a matter of religion; here we are to know no man after the flesh.

Verse 4. James draws an obvious conclusion with a rhetorical question. They had made a clear distinction between the two visitors based solely on external appearances. One writer notes that

“...They have turned their attention from the "glorious" Lord (2:1) to the material splendor of fine clothes and a gold ring”.

The Bible is not against giving respect where it is due, but they took it upon themselves to decide who was worthy of honor. They knew nothing of the moral character of either person. Their measuring stick was strictly appearances, and this betrayed their evil motives. Clearly in



doing this they were not guided by any kind of just rules but were so moved by an opportunity for personal benefit. They honored the rich over the poor because they knew the poor could not contribute anything to their material and social well-being. On the other hand, they courted the rich, as there may have been personal gain to be realized; but that was not the case with the poor man.

So, the usher practiced favouritism because of what the rich man might do for the church. He did not practice gracious treatment of persons the way God does. This is of course double mindedness, that is, thinking like the world in this kind of case, while thinking like God in other matters.

Note also that the usher apparently represents all believers who have evil motives when judging visitors. His motive seems to be what the church could get from the visitors rather than what the church could give to them. This attitude of course forgets that the church should primarily serve others, rather than looking at people simply to get them to serve the church. They cared more for the outward appearance but

... the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). Remember the wise prophet Samuel's experience when he was sent by God to anoint a king from the sons of Jesse to replace the erring and rejected king Saul. When the eldest son of Jesse Eliab who was a tall and stately man just like Saul was, came before Samuel, the prophet looked at him and said in his heart that he was surely the chosen successor to king Saul. But Samuel that great prophet and administrator of Israel was wrong. None of Jesse's sons who were brought to Samuel at first was the chosen one, and Samuel had to ask Jesse plaintively Are these all your sons?

So, this was written to remind us as one writer states:

"The reminder to Samuel resonates still- a person's appearance is no basis for determining their worth. God looks on the heart and we are commanded to show no favouritism:"

This shows that we misunderstand who is important and blessed in the sight of God. We should not form a definite judgment of people based on their first appearance. A stranger coming into any place of worship, no matter what his rank, dress, or complexion, should be treated with respect and everything should be done to sway the individual to Christ.

We shudder when think of our human foolishness and we read the words of Isaiah 53:2 about Jesus Himself and how men looked at Him:

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering".

Jesus was a working man with rough calloused hands from doing a carpenter's work. He was regarded as a country bumpkin from the despised region of Galilee.

But He treated the despised, the lepers, the beggars, the sinners, the high and the low well. He took everyone seriously and loved all those He met. He did not play favourites. We should be like Him.

It is interesting to note that as one writer states:

"There were even shops in Rome where rings would be rented for special occasions" so that when a person came into the church that appeared to be rich, wearing many rings with great ostentation in order to appear to be wealthy, practicing favouritism would mean that the church was being quite foolish in their judgment.



Verse 5. ...my beloved brethren... James was blunt, but his words were motivated by love for his readers (1:16, 19). He shows them that the rich had no special claim on their favor, and if it must be, then the poor were probably more entitled to their esteem. The apostle was well aware of their circumstances and reminded them of two facts starting with '*Has God not chosen the poor...*'

God has sovereignly chosen (elected) the poor. Remember that from God's perspective we are all poor for our portfolios means nothing. All God sees when He looks at us are broken, needy, lost and inadequate persons. But when some from the mass of persons who are all poor, recognize their poverty they then are in a position to accept the entreaties of the Spirit. Many therefore are called, but few are chosen.

This does not mean every poor person will be saved or that every rich person will be lost. God is as willing to save the rich as the poor, for He does not show favoritism. God has His remnant among all sorts of people. Still, the circumstances of the poor are such that they are more likely to embrace the gospel than the rich. In fact the great mass of believers are those who have a comparatively modest lifestyle (1 Corinthians 1:26-28; Matt.19:23-26) and since riches are an obstacle to the kingdom of God, there is a sense in which the poor of this world are specially blessed by God.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:26 indicate that God has chosen the poor first. Whether we like it or not, they are first in line even though God does not reject the rich nor refuse to have them come to Him. It appears that the rich generally have pride and feel that they are self-sufficient and do not need God, and so when God calls them, they generally do not answer.

James clearly implies that those chosen by God should not be treated with neglect, neither in the times of the Apostles, nor in our time.

This applies to the rich or the poor. We have to be careful not to judge the rich and get angry at them and abuse them.

rich in faith... They are rich in the spiritual realm. They might be poor and lacking material possessions, but they are rich in a higher and more important sense. They have faith in God and salvation with all its blessings. Salvation and spiritual assets are the only true and lasting riches, everything else is only for a time (Luke 12:15-21).

There is a place for those who have wealth. Their role should be as the poor Christians in that their faith still should be strong because of what God has done for them, but they can also consider the use of their wealth and estates to do good works, because they have the means to do so.

*heirs of the kingdom...*Inheritors of the glorious kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament and promised by Christ. They are '*heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ*' (Rom. 8:17). They may not look like much in the eyes of the world, but they are those who have true wealth.

*those who love Him...*are the same as those who receive the *crown of life* in 1:12.

Verse 6. James here presses his point: Despite God's favourable disposition to the poor, they were being insulted, dishonoured, humiliated and treated with scant courtesy. How different was the behaviour of our Lord? When a Christian dishonors the poor, he or she treats them exactly opposite to the way God treats them (1 Cor. 11:22; 1 Pet. 2:17). James reminded his readers that the characteristic response of the rich was to oppress them (Mark 13:9; Acts 4:1-3; 13:50; 16:19; 19:23-41). How inconsistent it is to despise one's friends and honor one's foes! The oppression in view could have been physical and or legal.



One writer notes: **If you look at the life of Jesus you can see He treated everyone the same. He could go into Jerusalem and minister to the invalid- the poor cripple man at the pool of Bethesda, the bottom of the bottom- and yet He could spend time with Nicodemus who was a ruler of the Jews. On the way to Jericho, He could stop and talk to Zacchaeus who was in the top of a sycamore tree watching Him. He was the wealthiest man in Jericho. And yet He could also stop and heal blind Bartimaeus rattling a tin cup. He is our example. He could bring the gospel, the good news, to the rich and to the poor as well. We need to be sure we don't discriminate against the rich in that way. Everyone has the same opportunity.**

The rich were in fact oppressing the believers, likely more so because they were Christians. At every opportunity and pretence, the Christians would be dragged before the courts and it is not hard to imagine where the sympathy of the courts lay. This oppression could include social and economic, as well as religious persecution. They could use their influence to bar the Christians from some communal activities and victimize them in their hiring practices. This word *oppress* is used in the Septuagint in a number of passages which speak of the abuse of the poor (Ezek. 22:29; Zech. 7:9,10).

The Sadducees, a ruling party of the rich were often in the forefront of those opposing the church,
(Acts 4:1-17 5:17,18, 26-40).

Verse 7. blaspheme the name... Clearly wealthy Christians are not to be considered as being part of those James call 'rich'. The word 'noble' means 'beautiful', excellent,' eminent, precious. Jesus Christ is the name in view.

*by which you have been called...*a term that speaks to ownership and marks them as belonging to Christ.
(Deut. 28:10).

James makes yet another point to show that the "rich" (the disobedient and materialistic Jesus denying ones) were not deserving of any honour from Christians. That group was likely making efforts to demonize the Christians, so as to justify their persecution and this would involve vilifying the name of Christ. If the founder could be smeared the fall-out would hit the followers and so they profaned and blasphemed the name of Christ. (Psalm 73:1-14). Favoring the rich was contrary to all good reason.

One writer finds it remarkable that so many Christians love the world despite its contempt for the religion. He writes: **"... many who profess to be Christians have been more disposed to treat even such persons with respect and attention than they have their own brethren, if they were poor; that they have cultivated the favour, sought the friendship, desired the smiles, aped the manners, and coveted the society of such persons, rather than the friendship and the favour of their poorer Christian brethren. Even though they are known to despise religion in their hearts, and not to be sparing of their words of reproach and scorn towards Christianity; though they are known to be blasphemers, and to have the most thorough contempt for serious, spiritual religion, yet there is many a professing Christian who would prefer to be at a party given by such persons than at a prayer-meeting where their poorer**



brethren are assembled; who would rather be known by the world to be the associates and friends of such persons, than of those humble believers who can make no boast of rank or wealth, and who are looked down upon with contempt by the great and the gay.”

Verse 8. James shifts his argument from accusation to that of advice and exhortation. James did not mean Christians should avoid honoring the rich but that we should love everyone and treat every individual as we would treat ourselves (Matt. 7:12; Lev. 19:18).

Proper and acceptable Christian behaviour must of necessity be rooted in the Law of God and here he cites what he calls the *royal law*. This is the command that is at the core of the whole Law.

Some think it is called a "*royal law*," or *kingly law*, on account of its scope, excellence and its prominence and importance among other Laws, as a King has among other men.

The Royal Law is royal for it is the law of the King, that is the head of the kingdom that believers will inherit according to verse 5. This phrase "royal law" was commonly used throughout the Roman empire and its primary nature was to govern all other laws and James applies the concept here.

Another consideration is that it is the Law in which all others are fulfilled. He quotes Leviticus 19:18 and Jesus used this same passage along with Deuteronomy 6:4-5 as the two laws which summarize all of the remaining laws (Matt. 22:36-40). John says that these two commands are inseparable (I John 4:19-21). Paul says that the command to Love your neighbour fulfills the whole Law (Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:8-10).

as yourself – speaks to both the degree and the manner of the Love that is to be shown. This is a supernatural Love that marks us off as true children of God (Gal. 5:22; John 13:34-35).

Neighbours included everyone, the wealthy and the poor (Luke 10:29-37). We must love all our neighbors with the same level of concern and care that we have for ourselves. We have previously gone through a Lesson about **Loving Your Neighbour** (Luke 10:25-37; Oct. 17th, lesson 7). Here this Apostle continues to highlight the importance of understanding what that really means in the Kingdom of God. James reminds his readers that the Royal law calls for equality. There should not be preferential treatment to one's neighbour. Showing partiality violates the principle of "equal treatment under the law." In any case the Law of Love cannot be broken without serious consequences for it is the Primary Law.

Verse 9. Whatever one might have called partiality, here James stamps it as **sin**. This type of preferential treatment violates the Royal Law because it treats some as inferior and others as due special favor

(Acts 10:34). It also violates specific commands concerning God's will in interpersonal dealings (Matt. 7:12; Lev. 19:15).

But... marks a contrast to the commandment in verse eight. They are convicted of committing sin and being transgressors (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; 16:19).

James uses two words to describe the violation. *Sin* is to miss the mark, come short. *Transgress* is to deliberately overstep, go beyond the boundary. Under any guise partiality was sin and no amount of rationalization could bypass the Law. James makes the emphatic assertion and



regardless of how people felt about partiality, whether they were ignorant of its moral consequences or if they felt convicted in their hearts, the law declared it sin!

Verse 10-11. Many people think of salvation in terms of: 'have they done more good than bad' and if that is the case, then they will be acceptable to God. The next step in this kind of reasoning is to minimize their sin and downplay the seriousness of particular sins with the explanation, 'nobody is perfect.'

James rebuffs this idea by presenting the Law as a complete 'whole'. Consequently, we cannot be selective in our obedience to the Law of God. To break the Law in one area is to break the Law. The Law is not to be viewed as a series of separate commands, but the expression of the whole will of God.

We should not minimize our sin by emphasizing the part of the Law that we happen to like and obey. James here guards us against selective obedience, so that we will not pick and choose which commands of God to obey and which ones we can safely ignore. All of the Law rest on the authority of God and His sovereign right to make law.

It is understood that not all sins are equal, but that all carry the same contempt of the authority of the Lawgiver, and so bind over to such punishment as is threatened on the breach of that law. James would have his readers understand the importance of total obedience and to impress on them the enormity of sin, from the fact that the violation of any one precept is an offence against the whole Law of God. The *whole law* means *all* the law of God; all that He requires of us; all that He has given to regulate our lives.

He makes a compelling argument to show that partiality to the rich and discrimination against the poor was to break God's law. He then states a principle (vs.10); to break God's law in this one area was to become a violator of the whole law. His audience was likely scrupulous in keeping other parts of the law, but James says that was not to their credit, if the law was broken in the matter of dealing equally with their neighbors.

For... indicates the explanation of the principle in verse 10. Thus, we may not be guilty of breaking the law by committing adultery, but if we murder, then we are lawbreakers anyway. To break the law at one point is to break the whole law. Those who show partiality to others are lawbreakers.

God the Lawgiver condemns both the sin of partiality and breaking all other Laws.

Obedience is then acceptable when all is done with an eye to the will of God; and disobedience is to be condemned, in whatever instance it be, as it is a contempt of the authority of God; and, for that reason, if we offend in one point, we condemn the authority of Him who gave the whole law, and so far, are guilty of all.

Verse 12-13. He concludes this section with an exhortation to live consistently with the word of God.

...speak and do... encompass all the activities of our lives and in every area, our behaviour must be conditioned by a constant awareness of the certainty of the coming judgment. All men have a fixed appointment with and are destined to stand before Jesus Christ to be evaluated by Him as their judge

(Acts 10:42; 17:31). To show partiality in our judgments is to ignore the certainty of consequences when we stand before Christ our Judge. There is a judgment for the saints (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10), just as there is a judgment for unbelievers (John 5:22-29; Acts



17:30-31; Hebrews 9:27) If men have not shown mercy to those in need, then they should not expect God to be merciful to them in their day of judgment.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matt. 5:7). The fact of coming judgment is to be a strong motivation to godly living on the part of every believer. (2 Cor.5:9-10).

the law of liberty (1:25) ... This is the Law which brings true liberty (John 8:32-36; Rom. 8:2) and it is by this law that we shall be judged. All men are slaves to sin and only the Son of God can set us free. All will be judged from the law to which all must give obedience and submission. The whole law is fulfilled in Christ and thus it is the *law of liberty*. So, we are free to be what God created us to be, not to do as we please.

James is teaching us to be just and impartial, but very compassionate and merciful to the poor; and it will set us on a path perfectly free from all sordid and undue regards to the rich.

The Gospel is called a Law. It has all the requisites of a law: precepts with rewards and punishments annexed; it prescribes duty, as well as administers comfort; and Christ is a king to rule us as well as a prophet to teach us, and a priest to sacrifice and intercede for us. We are under the law to Christ.

This means men's eternal condition will be determined according to the Gospel. When we shall stand before the judgment-seat, there will be no relief to those whom the Gospel condemns, nor will any accusation lie against those whom the Gospel justifies.

Justice is not sacrificed in the name of mercy. Rather, in mercy, God has met the demands of justice for us. He did not give us what we deserved, but what we needed. He rescued us by giving His own Son. The one who rejects that mercy will be judged without mercy (Rev. 14:10-11).

CONCLUSION

It is important to remind ourselves that God's will is not fragmentary. We cannot pick and choose or be selected in our obedience to God's will. We cannot choose what we like and leave out the rest.

Remember we will all be judged.

James tells us that all that is involved in that evil. True Religion must be manifested even if one is undergoing personal adversity and affliction. There can be no occasion when the royal law of love, which is rooted in the character of God, should not be observed.

Everyone in the church should be treated equally. We are forbidden to practice partiality.

Rather than to avoid the poor and the needy, we are to seek to serve them by meeting their needs. We do not shun the rich either, but we must not show partiality to the rich. Partiality should not be shown to the rich or the poor.

God is impartial and His people must be likewise in some measure.

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly, (Lev.19:15). (See Ex. 23:3; &Deut. 1:17).

All believers should examine themselves in the light of God's standard and the questions are: Have you seen yourself as a lawbreaker?

Have you responded to the mercy of God as demonstrated in Christ?



Those who have been redeemed are obligated to be a people of mercy. Certainly partiality, a failure to show mercy to one who needs it, cannot be a part of our lives as believers.

Partiality violates love just as murder and adultery violates Love.

Live to benefit others and be generous with the gifts that God has given to you.

Be careful. One writer warns us: **Favouritism reveals a heart that loves things, status and power and will use people to get things.**

Remember therefore that “true faith”, the faith of Jesus Christ is impartial.

Later in his epistle James tells us that any faith that does not bear some kind of fruit gives little basis for confidence about our profession. One is saved by faith alone, apart from works but a living faith should bear fruit. Is your faith a living faith, or a dead faith?

Jesus Christ came to save sinners, by grace, through faith in His shed blood on the cross of Calvary. Have you entrusted your eternal destiny to Him by accepting His free gift of salvation? Let our lives give substance to the sincerity of our profession.

