

# James 2

## James 2.1-4 – Sin of partiality

**V1** – Notice the use of *"my brethren"* (2.5, 14) – James uses this term in the letter to signal the beginning of a new thought

-**Remember the setting for the book?** Christians were being persecuted and were suffering, while they could see others who had everything they wanted

-**What temptations might that give to Christians?** To show favoritism toward the rich people

-**What is the significance of the word *"glorious"* in verse 1?** Jesus Christ was glorious, but was not received

-**How poor was Christ? Read Matthew 8.20**

-**What was the only thing of any value that he owned?** His seamless robe

-**Which apostle had to learn that God did not show favoritism?** Apostle Peter (concerning the Gentiles) - **Read Acts 10.34-35**

-**Read Hebrews 11.36-38** – Great men and women of the Old Testament had just about nothing, according to the views of the world

**V2** – **Who would come into the assembly of the Christians?** A rich man and a poor man

-**Do we have cases like that today?** Yes

-Several years ago at our congregation we had a visitor who arrived in a Porsche 944 – we have also had poor people who have walked to the church building

-And several months ago, a man wanted to sleep at the foot of the steps on the south side of the building - we took him to a motel in town for the evening

-We have some members today who are out of work, others are poorly paid, and sometimes they apologize for dressing poorly, but that is not necessary!

-According to James, all people are equal in the eyes of God, and the cost of our clothing does not matter at all

-**How does James describe the rich man?** Gold ring, dressed in fine clothes

-**How does he describe the poor man?** Dressed in dirty clothes

**V3** – **But what is the human tendency?** To show favoritism toward the rich

-It has been said that if suddenly all people around the world had exactly the same skin color, by noon the next day there would be prejudice on the basis of eye color or height or some other distinction

-**Why does Satan encourage favoritism and special treatment of certain people?** Because it is against the will of God, and all sin has some enjoyment to it

-**What are people tempted to do to the rich man?** Sit him in a “good” place (at the front of the auditorium)

-In First Century Judaism, the “good place” was at the front near the scrolls and the rabbis

-Remember that Jesus had a parable about those who wanted to sit at the head table

-**Read Luke 14.7-11** – Parable of the Guests

-**Read Luke 14.12-15** – We are to give preference to the poor among us

-**What are people tempted to do to the poor man?** Stand (not sit, as with rich man) *“over there”* or sit on footstool

-**Does clothing identify people and their class today?** Yes

**-Example?** Designer labels, latest colors and styles, expensive shoes, expensive hand bags

**V4 – What was James' conclusion?** People are judging with evil motives

**-What kind of judging are we to have today? Read John 7.24** - We are not to judge by outward appearance

**-So what is judging with evil motives?** Going by outward appearances, clothing, money, etc.,

**James 2.5-7** – God's love for poor people

**V5 – How do we know that God loves poor people?** Because there are so many of them in the church - **Read 1 Corinthians 1.26-30**

-Abraham Lincoln said, "God must have loved poor people, because he made so many of them"

-Generally, we do not have too many members who are rich

**-What did our Lord say about the chances of a rich person being saved? – Read Matthew 19.16-26** (eye of needle...)

**-Can rich people be saved?** Yes, but the point of Jesus is that it is hard for them to be saved (because of their temptations)

-Rich man and Lazarus, rich fool, rich young ruler (all in the gospel of *Luke*)

**-Read 1 Timothy 6.6-10**

**-What kingdom have we inherited?** The Kingdom of God (the church)

**-So if we are poor according to the world, what can we rejoice in?** That we are rich in the eyes of God

**-Read Proverbs 30.8-9** – We need a balance in our lives (between riches and poverty)

**V7 – What had rich people done to the name of Christ?** Blasphemed it

**-How had the rich blasphemed the name of Christ?** They had called themselves Christians and then had denied the faith (name "Christian"): *Acts 11.26, 26.28, 1 Peter 4.14-16*

**James 2.8-13** – Condemnation for mistreating the poor

**V8 – What were the Christians to be fulfilling?** The royal law

-Notice again that Christians are under a law (it is different from the Old Law, but it is still a law)

-Point: we are not free to do whatever we want to do and think that God will be pleased

**-In what sense is this a "royal" law?** It came from our King, not from the fathers as in the Patriarchal Age, not from the prophets and priests as in the Law of Moses

-Jesus quoted *Leviticus 19.18* (love neighbor as self) in the passage about rich young ruler (*Matthew 19.19*) – so this Old Testament passage became a part of the New Covenant

**-What lessons do we learn from *verse 8b* (loving neighbor as self)?** We are not to love our neighbor instead of ourselves

-But we are to love ourselves (some people have a self-hatred, because of things that they have done in past years, or because they were abused while growing up)

-But this passage tells us that we need a healthy love of ourselves, and we need to extend that love to others

**-What parable do we have about loving our neighbor?** Parable: Good Samaritan (*Luke 10.30-37*)

**-So how does the Bible define our "neighbor"?** Anyone in need (not just a person of the same race, color, even religion)

**V 9 – What about the person who is good, but he shows partiality?** He has violated the whole law of God

- This passage has tremendous lessons for us today:
  - racial prejudice
  - prejudice against the poor
  - prejudice against other nationalities
  - prejudice against those who are different from us
  - slanted eyes
  - different skin color
  - different kind of hair
  - different height, etc.

**In a healthy congregation of the Lord's church,** there will be people who are different (but who are faithful Christians and well within the guidelines of the Scriptures)

- We should be careful not to want to homogenize to church, so that the church is so composed only of people just like us
- Several years ago the writer of these notes visited the Strathmore congregation in Toronto, Canada, and in talking to people after the service my wife and I noticed nine different nationalities there for that one occasion – very remarkable – all worshipping together in peace
- James is very forceful here:** we are not to show any trace of partiality in the Lord's church
- Out there in the world, partiality is widespread, and more laws will not fix it
- It requires a change in the human heart, and the only thing powerful enough to change the human heart is the gospel of Jesus Christ
- The church, therefore, is to set the example when it comes to acceptance and love (within the guidelines of the Scriptures)
- Remember the shock in *Acts 11* when Peter baptized the first Gentiles into the body of Christ

**V 10 – What about the person who is good, but shows partiality?** He has violated the whole law

**V 11 – What two commandments are quoted here?** No adultery, no murder

- What does it mean to violate one of these laws of God?** We have broken the whole law, and unless we are sinless, we are lost
- In the *Gospel Advocate NT Commentary (James)*, Guy N. Woods talks about sheep that are surrounded by a wooden fence – a sheep jumps over one wooden panel
- He is outside the fence - he does not have to jump over every panel to be outside – one is enough
- So if we violate one part of the law of Christ (and do not repent), we have violated the entire law
- We must not say, “This is just one little part of the law of God – he won’t care if we treat the rich man in a special way and have the poor man sit at the back of the auditorium”

**V 12 – Another reference to the law of liberty**

- Do people try to take advantage of the law of liberty?** Yes, “We’re under grace, so we don’t have to be perfect”
- Where did Paul speak of people who abuse the Word of God that way? Read Romans 6.1-2** (speaking of giving in to sin because we are covered by grace)

**V 13** – **How will God treat those who have not shown mercy to the poor?** No mercy will be shown to them in the Judgment Day

-and we will have to have mercy to be saved on that day

(*Matthew 5:7*) *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*

-At our local congregation the elders have stopped the selling of items at the building (not that the building is sacred – if we were meeting in a house, it would be the same)

-The ban is on selling anything when the church assembles for worship – people may not be able to afford to buy candy bars that support the local band or hockey team (remember the money-changers in the temple)

-We don't want anyone to be offended by not having the money to buy those things, and we try to keep expenses down for church activities

James 2.13 should scare us – we cannot be saved without the mercy of God

-Let us do all we can to avoid offending the poor among us and the “different” among us

**James 2.14-17** – Faith must also have works

**V 14** – Notice the use of “*my brethren*” again

-This is the passage that caused Martin Luther to condemn the book of *James*

-He called it an “epistle of straw” – he did not believe that it should be in the Bible

-In Martin Luther's German translation of the Bible, he inserted the word “*only*” in *Romans 3.28* (we are saved by faith only, which is not correct)

-Luther was reacting to the sale of indulgences (permission slips to commit some sin) by the Pope to finance the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome

There are two kinds of works in the New Testament:

1. Works that people claim will cause them to be saved (meritorious works)

2. Works that are an expression of our faith - **Read Ephesians 2.8-9**

-Paul was writing against works that make people think that they are going to be saved

-But James is writing about works that we do, not to be saved, but because our faith is so strong

**-Can faith without the second kind of works save us?** No

-So having a weak faith is no good

**V 15** – **What “hypothetical” situation does James bring up?** A fellow Christian is in need of clothing and food

**V 16** – **Does this apply to non-Christians who are in need?** - **Read Galatians 6.10** – we are to help fellow Christians first, then help those outside the church (if we have the means to do so)

**V 17** – Remember James is talking about works that demonstrate our faith, not works that we use to try to earn our salvation (meritorious works)

**James 2.18-24** – Practical examples

**V 18** – James pretends that there is someone who objects to his comments

**-James: Is it possible to have faith without works?** No – James will show that a person's faith

will produce works

**V 19 – What great illustration does James use at this point?** The demons have “*faith*” – they believe and shudder – **Read Mark 1.23-26**

-**Are the demons going to be saved?** Of course not – just believing in God will not save a person

**V 20 – James' conclusion?** Faith without works is useless

**V 21 – What is James' next illustration?** Abraham when he offered up Isaac

-**Did Abraham actually offer up Isaac on the altar?** No

-**So why did James say that Abraham offered up Isaac?** He would have done it, if the angel had not stopped him

**V 22-23 – So what saved Abraham?** His faith (“he believed”)

-**But how strong was his faith?** Strong enough to produce works

**V 24 – So are we justified by faith or works?** By a faith that produces works

**James 2.25-26** – A final example

**V 25 – What other examples did James give?** Rahab the harlot

-**Who was she?** The prostitute in Jericho – *Joshua 2*

-**Could she have rejected the spies?** Yes – she could have said, “I believe in the one true God, but I cannot take you in. It is too dangerous.”

-**But what saved Rahab?** She acted on her faith

**V 26 – Very interesting – What is the Biblical definition of death?** The body without the spirit

-So death is the separation of the body and the spirit (rules out people dying and coming back to life and having “near death experiences”)

-It also rules out ghosts, vampires, spirit beings, mummies, etc.

-A person cannot die and come back from the dead (without a miracle from God)

**Read Hebrews 9.27**

-**What is James' point?** Faith without works is dead, just as the body without the spirit is dead

**Lessons from James 2:**

1. No discrimination or partiality against the poor
2. The importance of works and obedience

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