

James & Jude Lesson 4: James 2:1-13

Read James 2:1-13

At the end of chapter one we find James instructing his readers to seek a better religion that is pure and undefiled; one that is not worthless, but filled with actions that back words spoken. He does this by introducing the Gospel as the "the perfect law, the law of liberty" (James 1:25). In so doing, James teaches the correlation between God's will and the treatment and care of others. The freedom we find in the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), this law that James will refer to also as "the royal law" (James 2:8), is to compel true disciples of Jesus to view others the way He does. We must not simply claim to have salvation, and then fail to allow that salvation to influence every facet of our lives.

This is what James is warning against as he instructs his audience to not be deceived into thinking there is a disconnect between salvation and the treatment of others. Thus his teaching of "pure and undefiled religion" (James 1:27) is firmly rooted in the value placed on caring for those society claims has little or no value, in this case widows and orphans. We must view people differently than the rest of the world if the "law of liberty" (James 2:12) is to have its work and we become complete in Christ (Colossians 1:28). As we dive into chapter two he continues in keeping with a form of pure religion by dealing with the treatment of others.

James instructs these Christians to not have any partiality as they hold the faith in our Lord. One cannot have a genuine faith if he does not show love by proper means. It is hypocrisy,

phony, and a falls in line with the idea of deception. Judging man by his initial appearance goes against what is clearly instructed in verse one that is NOT to be done. The Greek meaning for partiality shown is actually to "receive faces", indicating that our treatment of man based on initial observation is a show of discrimination, also known as a sin (Deuteronomy 1:17, Leviticus 19:15). It places us upon the throne of "judge", and not just any judge, but with improper thoughts!

In-depth point: The faith referenced in verse 1 refers to a standard of doctrine. This means that we are not to believe in a doctrine of partiality. It's not a subjective faith, but an objective faith as a standard. God does not have a standard of showing partiality.

There is a disconnect between the faith they claim to possess, and their implementation. God's people should be displaying the most love! God promises extend to the poor, as well as those blessed with earthy gain. When God's people get caught up in the danger of partiality, it is they who are spitting on God's plan. God puts us on equal playing fields, but we must not look at the situation through an earthly lens. We are to be mature in the faith and provide all treatment with love.

Finer Grounds

Why do you think someone would show partiality to someone who is rich, as opposed to poor? Or whom they feel does not have the "right" color of skin, occupation, or social standing?

Have you ever witnessed this type of partiality? If so, how was it handled and what were the ramifications?

The hypocrisy is most evident when special attention (James 2:3) is given to the ones who are actually committing oppression. Chapter one makes it clear that regardless of the material status one holds that all have access to the kingdom, but these two-faced actions are foolish. Those who commit this oppression have blasphemed the name of Jesus (James 2:6-7), the standard by which the Christian claims salvation. By elevating these oppressors, the Christian has fallen in line with society instead of being transformed by the very gospel they claim to have followed. Thus, they are judges with evil motives.

James 2:8 reiterates the burden that is placed on the one who does not love their neighbor and is guilty of partiality thus they are guilty of breaking the "royal law". They are to blame in this idea of "receiving faces" and they are working sin, instead of applying faith. You cannot pick and choose which laws apply to you. You must be diligent to live by all!

Thus the transition to examples in verses 10 and 11 make complete sense when you consider James is attempting to bring the audience to an understanding that they themselves cannot claim to be under the law of love and then not show love even to their poor neighbors. The logic he uses here is drawing from rabbinical teaching of the Law of Moses in that claiming to be saved by law keeping, if one breaks one part of the law it is as if he's broken the entirety of the Law. There is no partial keeping.

The example of murder and adultery were typically seen as the sins most opposed to the Law of Moses and definitely most opposed to the call to love of one's neighbor. Thus, even though one didn't commit adultery they can't claim they aren't lawbreakers because if they commit murder a law is broken and they are counted as "law-breakers". There is no "good" to be had in partially being what God would have you to be.

The mercy that is extended to us will be based upon the mercy we choose to extend to others. By choosing to grant compassion to others, we can anticipate an extension of compassion in our own judgment (James 2:13).