

FPFWC Christian Development



Godly Love Among Believers

November 2020

Fall Quarter

November 28, 2020

Lesson #5 – Impartial Love

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 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

ICE BREAKERS

1. What has God promised to the poor of this world? (2:5)
2. In what practical ways can we show genuine love to people of different races, cultures, and economic standing?

LESSON BACKGROUND

James described himself as a “servant of ... the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). This author could have made a bolder claim, however, for he was the half brother of Jesus. Everyone in their hometown of Nazareth assumed they were natural brothers, two out of five: Jesus, James, Joses, Juda, and Simon (Mark 6:3). The order the brothers are listed in implies that James was the second oldest of the brothers and would have become the family head after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. The boys grew up together in a faithful Jewish household in rural Galilee. They both learned the carpenter’s trade in their father’s workshop and studied and worshipped in the village synagogue.

Although James did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah during Jesus’ ministry (John 7:5), a dramatic change occurred after the resurrection, following an encounter with the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7). Acts tells us that the brothers of Jesus (including James) were part of the earliest fellowship in Jerusalem that became the church (Acts 1:14). James became a leader in the Jerusalem church (15:13).

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that James was very familiar with Jesus’ teachings. He echoes the oral instruction of Jesus with confidence that his own teaching is true to Jesus’ original intent.

The epistle of James reflects a very early stage in the development of the church, when it was composed primarily of Jewish Christians. The congregation he is addressing in the letter seems to be made up entirely of Jewish believers in Christ. So, for example, James could easily reference Jewish customs or laws without needing to explain himself to his audience (see James 2:8–11, below). His audience would have been familiar with the value of the Jewish law for ethical guidance, while understanding its inadequacy for salvation by faith in Christ.

LESSON COMMENTARY –

Sin of Partiality (2:1–13)

2:1–4. The maxim in 1:19 contains the injunction to be “quick to hear.” In this passage, being “quick to hear” God’s Word means, among other things, refusing to show favoritism to the rich. James pointed out that true religion consists in showing kindness to the disadvantaged (1:27), and the related idea is that of refusing to cater to the rich (2:1–13). These readers would be especially susceptible to such partiality in light of their oppressive circumstances (cf. 1:1–12)—that is, they might be tempted to show partiality to the rich in the hope of gaining financial assistance from them. Discrimination is one of the worldly stains to avoid (1:27). Showing **favoritism** or honor to anyone other than Christ disregards the exclusive glory that belongs to Him (**our glorious Lord**). James illustrates partiality with a rich man who **comes into** the reader’s **assembly** or church meeting (vv. 2–4; cf. 1Co 14:23–25) and is given **special attention**. Money, prestige, or the need for financial security may have driven their **evil motives**, an understandable but unacceptable impulse even during hard times.

2:5. The rich rely on their money (Mt 19:23), but the **poor of this world** become wealthy or **rich in faith**. To be **heirs of the kingdom** may be equivalent to entering and enjoying the kingdom at the end of the age. Others understand the phrase to mean that faithful believers will receive a position of authority in the future world (Lk 12:43–44; Ac 20:32; Col 3:24; Rv 2:26). For **those who love Him**, see 1:12.

2:6–7. James asked how the readers could have **dishonored the poor** since (1) God Himself honors the poor (1:6), (2) the rich force believers **into court** with false charges, and (3) the rich **blaspheme the fair name** of Jesus (1:1; 2:1) held so dear by Christians.

2:8–9. Jesus made **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR** (Lv 19:18, 34) a foremost command (Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31). This is **the royal law** because of its preeminence and because it was sanctioned by the King, the Lord Jesus. The OT command to love one’s neighbor (v. 8; Lv 19:18) prohibited **partiality** (v. 9), particularly against the poor (Lv 19:15).

2:10–13. The Mosaic law is an indivisible unit. Breaking one command incurs the same penalty for breaking **the whole law**. Please note that although the law is a unit, this does not mean that all commandments are equal. Jesus referred to both the greatest commandments (Mt 22:36–40) and the “weightier provisions” of the law (Mt 23:23). The word **guilty** does not refer to feelings of blame but to God’s judicial indictment. God is “one” (cf. Jms 2:19) and spoke against both **ADULTERY** and **MURDER** (v. 11). To violate either one makes a person **a transgressor of the law**. The sin of partiality is elevated to the sins of adultery and murder. Christians must **speak** and **act** (v. 12) out of the forgiveness they have received. For **the law of liberty**, see the commentary at 1:25. The evaluation or **judgment** (v. 13) of Christians who have **shown no mercy** will be exacting (cf. 3:1). For those who treat others with mercy, mercy **triumphs** (wins out) **over** a stern evaluation (cf. Mt 5:7, 12). This judgment is limited to believers since the verse forms an inclusio with 3:1, where the judgment is on James and all Christian teachers. For God’s

evaluation of Christians in the future, see the comments on Rm 14:10–12; 1Co 3:10–17.

LESSON NUGGET – If you have true saving faith, you will practice impartiality and see people in terms of character and not clothing. You will not cater to the rich or ignore the poor, but you will love each person for the sake of Jesus Christ. Christian love simply means treating others the way the Lord treats you and doing it in the power of the Spirit.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*