

## THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

### JAMES 2:1-13, FAITH TEST 2: IMPARTIALITY

- A. A warning against partiality (1-7)
1. A command (1), ***My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.***
    - a. Faith in Christ is not compatible with partiality (prejudice).
    - b. *hold the faith*, in practice, as a matter of habit.
    - c. *partiality*
      - 1) Literally, to receive the face.
      - 2) Thomas Manton, ...*accepting someone's outside and respecting them for the external glory we find in them.*
      - 3) Motivation for partiality
        - a) Jude 16, *they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.*
        - b) Charles Cranfield, ...*the failure to oppose injustice for fear of the powerful.*
      - 4) Examples of impartiality
        - a) God, Deuteronomy 10:17, *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.*
        - b) Jesus, Luke 20:21, *So they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.*
        - c) Peter, Acts 10:34-35, *So Peter opened his mouth and said: Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.*
    - d. *the Lord of glory*
      - 1) A title of Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 2:8, *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
      - 2) Jesus is the basis for glory of every believer.
        - a) He gives honor to men.
        - b) Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, Hebrews 1:3a, *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature...*
        - c) There is no spiritual basis for discrimination since Jesus Christ is our glory.
  2. An illustration of partiality (2 - 4)
    - a. Condemnation of differing treatment of a rich man and a poor man in the assembly (2 - 3), ***For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet,"***
      - 1) Notes
        - a) *if...then*, third class conditional clause: a probable future event with the indicated result.
        - b) *assembly*
          - 1] Actually, the word is *synagogue*.
          - 2] Due to early nature of this epistle, no clear distinction made between Jewish and Christian places of worship. James considered himself a Christian Jew not a Jewish Christian.
      - 2) Description of a rich man (2a)
        - a) *gold ring*
          - 1] There is frequent mention of the enormous cost of rings in writings of the day.
          - 2] The practice of wearing rings was adopted by early Christians who adorned them with symbols of the faith, like the cross and the anchor.
        - b) *fine clothing*, actually may be translated as *bright or shining*.
      - 3) Description of a poor man (2b)
        - a) He is in *shabby clothing*.
        - b) The word may be translated *dull*.
        - c) Note the contrast between the bright clothes of the rich man and the dull clothes of the poor man.

- 4) Response by members
  - a) To the rich man
    - 1] *you pay attention*
      - a] *you* is plural.
      - b] The force of the verb is to *look with special consideration* as in Luke 9:38, *And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child.*
    - 2] The rich man was offered a *good place*.
      - a] It was a seat of honor.
      - b] Matthew 23:6, *...and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues*
  - b) To the poor man
    - 1] He could stand.
    - 2] He could sit at someone's feet.
      - a] It may mean on the ground beside the person.
      - b] Possibly, as at Tell Hum, a synagogue of the 2nd or 3rd century which had a stone bench running along the walls and a lower tier for the feet of those sitting on the bench.
- 5) Condemnation by James (4), ***have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?***
  - a) *made distinctions among yourselves*
    - 1] Basic sense of the verb in the New Testament is *doubt*.
    - 2] Marvin Vincent, *in making distinction between rich and poor, they expressed a doubt concerning the faith which they professed, a faith which abolished such distinctions.*
  - b) *judges with evil distinctions*
    - 1] The verb indicates *facing both ways* in their rulings.
    - 2] John 7:24, *Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.*
  - c) A caution for Christians
    - 1] Thomas Manton, *The gold ring was preferred to a rich faith.*
    - 2] Tertullian, *We must not judge faith by people, but people by faith.*
3. Godly instruction on partiality (5 - 7), ***Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?***
  - a. God's method of selection (5a)
    - 1) It is not after the methods of the world, 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, *For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*
    - 2) It is a paradox (contrast) like we saw in James 1:9-10, the rich poor and the poor rich.
  - b. The poor have God-given dignity (5b)
    - 1) *poor in the world*, is poor in the world's estimation.
    - 2) Dignity is based on the purposes of God:
      - a) That they *be rich in faith*, qualitative not quantitative.
      - b) That they *be heirs of the kingdom*, Matthew 5:3, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

- c. A qualification concerning the poor and the rich (5c)
  - 1) Poverty does not guarantee faith.
  - 2) The poor are often more responsive to spiritual things since the rich are easily occupied with possessions.
    - a) 1 Timothy 6:17, *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.*
    - b) Proverbs 30:8-9, *Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.*
  - 3) His promises are not for the poor exclusively but *to those who love Him*.
- d. Showing partiality toward the rich is an insult to the poor (6a)
  - 1) *dishonored* is a strong word which implies contempt.
  - 2) The contempt falls not only on the poor but God who chose them.
- e. A warning concerning the rich (6b -7)
  - 1) Not only is it evil to show partiality to the rich, it doesn't make sense.
  - 2) Considerations
    - a) They verb indicates present oppression by the rich.
      - 1] Oppression includes being taken to court.
      - 2] John Murray stated, *Perhaps few weaknesses have marred the integrity of the church more than the partiality shown to the rich. The church has compromised with their vices because it has feared the loss of their patronage...I think when a church is partial to the rich, it isn't any different than selling indulgences.*
    - b) The rich blaspheme the name of Christ.
      - 1] *The name by which you are called, Jesus Christ.*
      - 2] Philippians 2:9-11, *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

B. A model for impartiality (8-13)

- 1. Demand of the royal law (8), ***If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.***
  - a. It is good to fulfill the royal law
    - 1) It is loving your neighbor as yourself, Matthew 7:12, *So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*
    - 2) It governs all other laws dealing with human relationships
      - a) Matthew 22:37-39, *And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*
      - b) Galatians 5:14, *For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*
  - b. It is possible to fulfill the royal law, 1 John 5:3, *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*
  - c. It is sin not to fulfill the royal law (9), ***But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.***
    - 1) Showing partiality does not fulfill the royal law.
    - 2) Showing partiality identifies one as a *transgressor*.
      - a) A transgressor is one who oversteps the prescribed limit.
      - b) The law convicts, it does not justify.

2. The danger of partiality (10 - 11), *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*
  - b. The law demands complete obedience
    - 1) One failure makes a person accountable for all of the law.
      - a) The Honor Code at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point states: *A cadet does not lie, cheat, or steal; nor tolerate anyone who does.* Their Honor Code is so stringent that even one violation at any time during the four years of study, including the day before graduation, requires the automatic expulsion of the guilty party.
      - b) A. T. Robertson, *To be a lawbreaker one does not have to violate all the laws, but he must keep all the law to be a law abiding citizen.*
    - 2) *if you do not commit adultery, but do murder*
      - a) Why did James not reverse it?
      - b) The issue is not our perception of the magnitude of a particular sin.
      - c) It is the unity of the law which demands that one reject prejudice as well as every other sin.
3. A defense of mercy (12 - 13), *So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*
  - a. Submit to the law of freedom (12)
    - 1) Isn't there a conflict between keeping the law and freedom?
    - 2) This section contrasts two laws as seen in 2 Corinthians 3:3-8, *And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory?*
      - a) Law of Moses
        - 1] Written in stone.
        - 2] Brings bondage.
        - 3] Weak through the flesh.
        - 4] Designed to condemn.
      - b) Law of freedom (Law of Christ-Gal. 6:2)
        - 1] Written on the heart, Jer. 31:31.
        - 2] Brings freedom.
        - 3] Powerful by the Spirit.
        - 4] Designed to justify.
  - b. Realize that mercy triumphs over judgment (13)
    - 1) There is no mercy for "the one who has not shown mercy," Matthew 18:32-35, *Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.'*
    - 2) Spiritual maturity is seen in acts of mercy not prejudice.
    - 3) D. Edmond Hiebert, *The practice of mercy, giving a man what he needs and not what he deserves, will reveal that God's grace has produced a transformation in their lives.*

## CONCLUSION

- A. Partiality offends God, Mahatma Gandhi was leader of the Indian Nationalist movement and considered the father of his country. In his student days he became interested in the Bible. He was deeply touched by the reading of the Gospels and considered converting to Christianity. It seemed that Christianity offered the real solution to the caste system that divided the people of India. One Sunday, he went to a nearby church to attend services. He decided to speak to the minister and ask for instruction on the way of salvation. But when he entered the sanctuary, the ushers refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go and worship with his own people. He left and never came back. *If Christians have caste differences also, he said to himself, I might as well remain a Hindu.*

B. Impartiality pleases God

1. Paul Lee Tan, *Shortly after the close of the Civil War, a Negro entered a fashionable church in Richmond, VA, one Sunday morning at the beginning of a communion service. When the time came, he walked down the aisle and knelt at the altar. A rustle of shock and anger swept through the congregation. A distinguished layman immediately stood up, stepped forward to the altar and knelt beside his colored brother. Captured by his spirit, the congregation followed. The layman who set the example: Robert E. Lee.*
2. Bernard of Clairvaux (12th C.), when he happened to see a poor man poorly dressed, would say to himself, *Truly, Bernard, this man bears his cross more patiently than you do.* But if he saw a rich man very well dressed, then he would say, *It may be that this man, under his fine clothing, has a better soul than you have under your religious habit.*